The Disputed Mosque

A historical inquiry

Sushil Srivastava

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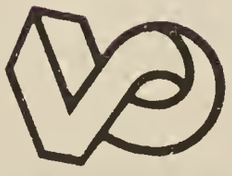
Sushil Srivastava



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Preface

This work is the outcome of several discussions with friends who encouraged me to explore the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy. In early 1986, some of us began to feel very strongly that the communal situation in North India had gone beyond redemption. We felt strange and insecure in a society where religious animosity had reached unmanageable proportions. A few friends belonging to the minority communities expressed the fear that religious minorities would have no future in India if the majority refused to make any adjustments. I felt very disturbed, all the more so because of my profession and the discipline to which I belong.

As a historian, I saw the present as the direct outcome of the past. In the absence of a defined sense of nationalism and with limited economic opportunities, people had tended to associate themselves with narrow sectarian groups. I was convinced that contemporary Indian society was passing through a period of transition and this had made adjustments and readjustments between social, political, economic and religious groups necessary and inevitable. I had, therefore, great hope for the future. It is clear, however, that these hopes will be fulfilled only if people can be made to understand the past, free of any personal biases. It is, therefore, necessary to record objectively the story of human progress. In short, I felt obliged as a social scientist and as a citizen of India to undertake a rational and objective study of a problem that had unnecessarily come to divide the people of this great land.

The idea of undertaking research on the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi developed during a visit that my family and I paid to Karvi–Chitrakoot in the Banda district of Uttar Pradesh. In Chitrakoot, we visited the nearly forgotten temple of *Balaji Thakur* and were surprised to see that it had the architectural

design of a mosque. (My son, Taasi, thought that he was inside a mosque.) Struck by this, we asked the priest about the history of the structure. He told us that the temple had been constructed at the behest of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb. The priest showed us the *firman* issued by Aurangzeb, with the royal seal. It assigned a few revenue-free villages for the maintenance of the temple. The priest also informed us that the construction of the temple had taken place under the personal supervision of an officer of Aurangzeb. This explained the unusual architecture of the temple.

We were puzzled when the priests of some other temples in Chitrakoot told us that Aurangzeb had attempted to destroy their temples during his military campaign in the area. Some priests even showed us dents on some of the idols which they claimed had been made by Aurangzeb himself. They described the miraculous powers of the idols which they called upon to save themselves from the Emperor's onslaught. All this was puzzling because historical records showed that Aurangzeb had never gone to Chitrakoot. There is evidence that Aurangzeb had led a military campaign to Kalinjar, more than a hundred miles from Chitrakoot, but it is surprising that no contemporary of Aurangzeb had recorded the visit of the Mughal Emperor to a place of such religious importance as Chitrakoot.

Mehr Afshan Farooqi, a scholar of medieval Indian history, realised how common but baseless myths enhance communal hatred and immediately started persuading me to popularise the historical truth. I therefore thought of attacking the established distortions in history and decided to write in local newspapers and newsmagazines about how popular myths distorted historical perspectives. My friends, Sumita and Ajit Parmar, the editor of *Probe India*, suggested an extensive study of the Ayodhya controversy.

My experience of collecting data on Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi was an unforgettable one. While my students were interested in what I had to say, my academic friends and teachers, with only a few exceptions, were unsympathetic. Professor B.N.S. Yadav, however, was keen to understand how communal hatred had developed in an area where no such tensions had ever been known. He agreed that Ayodhya's importance as a centre of

Hindu pilgrimage was of comparatively recent origin. However, there were a large number of academics, including a well-known scholar of Buddhism, who felt that such studies were of no value. He was probably convinced that scholars should not be influenced by the large-scale killings around them. Dr G.C. Tripathi, Director of the G.N. Jha Research Institute, Allahabad, was not too pleased with what I had to say regarding the worship of Lord Rama as an *avatar*. I think that after observing the popularity of the *Ramayana* on television he must have realised that the cult of a deity is an evolutionary process.

I visited Faizabad and Ayodhya several times during the writing of this book. In Faizabad I was warned by several people that I should never refer to the controversial building as the 'Babri Masjid'. They were adamant that I should only call it 'Shri Ramjanambhoomi'. I was shocked to see that a Rama Mandir had been set up in the central sanctum of the mosque, and more so when I was told that no Muslim was allowed within 200 yards of the Babri Masjid. Despite all this, it was a pleasure to be near the ugly mosque which now and at all times, wears a festive air. The place was apparently safe in the presence of the Central Reserve Police Force whose sole task was to stop people from photographing it. In front of the mosque a twenty-four-hour *kirtan* was in session and the row of shops opposite the Masjid was doing a brisk business in portraits of Rama, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman, as well as in inflammatory literature on the history of the struggle for the 'liberation' of the Ramjanambhoomi. In the old city of Ayodhya, the atmosphere was tense because of the presence of the police and the constant recitation of *Ram kirtan*. Yet, it was a pleasure and a great relief to talk to the local people. They were apparently unperturbed by the religious conflicts, and most of them continued to exchange greetings with fellow residents of the other community in the traditional manner. We met Dr Ram Raksha Tripathi and Gafoor Mian in Ayodhya. They related real facts regarding the controversy, and it was a good feeling that reasonable people still existed.

My stay in Faizabad convinced me that the local people still believed and retold old myths. A local journalist, who was convinced that I had come to Ayodhya to prove that the 'Janambhoomi' had

nothing to do with the birth of Lord Rama, warned me that if I deviated from the popular belief the monkey-god Hanuman would be displeased. To convince me, he related a popular local story. He said that on the day the court announced its decision to unlock the Babri Masjid, a monkey came and sat on the chair of the Honourable Judge. When the judge entered the court-room, it took a back seat. The monkey left after the decision to unlock the gates of the Babri Masjid had been announced. This proved that Lord Hanuman was anxious to have the birthplace of Lord Rama restored!

I began writing this book in 1987 and it has taken more than three years to complete. I accumulated several obligations during the course of collecting source material and writing the book. I am extremely grateful to Mitra Prakashan for highlighting the summary of this book in their publications. I would like to take this opportunity to express gratitude towards Ajit Parmar of *Probe India* and Babulal Sharma of *Maya* for all the encouragement they gave me. I am grateful to Professor B.N.S. Yadav and Professor Romila Thapar for giving me all the help I required. Professor I.H. Siddiqui encouraged me to proceed. Prem Babu of the Board of Revenue Library, Allahabad, was extremely helpful when I consulted his library. Mr S.R. Faruqi helped me in interpreting the Persian portions of the sources; I am extremely grateful to him. I must take this opportunity to thank the person who insisted that the book must be published; and for that I am indebted to my dear friend Dr Walter Andersen.

I must not forget to thank those who have been associated closely with the writing of the book. My student, Mr Indra Dhar Dwivedi, assisted me on field trips. I am grateful to Anwar Naim Siddiqui of the Govind Ballabh Pant Social Sciences Institute, Allahabad, for doing a very fine job with the maps. I would also like to express my gratitude to Mr Karamat Hussain for transcribing the inscription of the Babri Masjid in Persian. My thanks to Anil Kashyap for typing the manuscript.

July 1990 — Sushil Srivastava

Chapter One

Introduction

Babri Masjid and Shri Ramjanambhoomi are the names given by two religious groups to an obscure monument in Ayodhya. Yet the mere mention of the either name stirs intense hatred in the hearts of millions of Indians and arouses a barrage of accusations. All the common ties between Hindus and Muslims, which constitute the social fabric of this great land, seem to snap under the strain. Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi is the one issue that has most poisoned the communal situation after Independence. It has led to a considerable loss of human life and property and threatens to do even worse. Nothing less than the genuineness and vitality of our secularism, the strength of our commitment to the rule of law and, indeed, our very respect for humanity, are at stake. However, the issue is not easily amenable to a just solution because questions of faith, politics and money have become entwined with it.

The contemporary communal situation definitely became worse when issues related to the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi were raised by some fundamentalist groups. In the development of profound communal hatred, both Hindus and Muslims have obliterated the rich traditions of the cosmopolitan and secular culture of Avadh. Ayodhya has long been an important religious centre, where Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Islam have flourished and co-existed at different times. Both the remains and the presence of a large number of shrines, temples, tombs, mosques, gardens, and other structures of the past bear testimony to the secular tolerance of Faizabad.

The Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy assumed fearful dimensions soon after the decision of the District Court on

1 February 1986, to unlock the doors of the Babri Masjid. This came in the wake of a movement that had been launched by the Ramjanambhoomi Action Committee in 1984. The Committee was set up on 7 October 1984, and it immediately launched a *tala kholo* ('open the locks') campaign. A *rath yatra* ('Chariot Procession') was organised subsequently to extend and popularise the campaign. The assassination of Indira Gandhi led to the suspension of the agitation, but it was revived in twenty-five places on 25 October 1985. This time the Vishwa Hindu Parishad spearheaded the movement and 9 March 1985 was fixed as the day when the *raths* were to reach the banks of the river Saryu in Ayodhya. The leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad met the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and the District Magistrate of Faizabad to discuss the situation. Neerja Chowdhury reported in *The Statesman* (20 April 1986) the disclosure by a senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader that Rajiv Gandhi had indicated in no uncertain terms that the gates of the edifice 'must open to the devotees' before Shivaratri on 8 March 1986.

A lawyer of Faizabad filed an application on 25 January 1986 in the court of the *Munsif* Magistrate seeking removal of the restrictions on the Puja. It was an application relating to the civil cases in which he was not a party and he did not implead the Muslim individuals who were parties to the suit. The *Munsif* declined, judiciously enough, to pass orders since the file in the main case of the year 1950 was pending in the High Court and orders could be passed only in that suit. An appeal was filed on 31 January 1986 and heard on 1 February 1986. An application to be impleaded, by Mohammed Hashim, who came to know of the proceedings, was rejected. K. M. Pandey, the District Judge of Faizabad, recorded the statements of the District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police of Faizabad on the issue of law and order and, within forty minutes, ordered the opening of the locks. He observed:

> *It is clear that it is not necessary to keep the locks at the gates for the purpose of maintaining law and order or the safety of the idols. This appears to be an unnecessary irritant to the applicant and other members of the community.*

Having refused altogether to give a hearing to the Muslim parties, the judge said:

> *After having heard the parties it is clear that the members of the other community, namely the Muslims, are not going to be affected by any stretch of imagination if the locks of the gates are opened and the idols inside the premises are allowed to be seen and worshipped by the pilgrims and devotees. It is undisputed that the premises are presently in the court's possession and that for the last 35 years Hindus have had an unrestricted right to worship as a result of the court's orders of 1950 and 1951. If the Hindus are offering prayers and worshipping the idols, though in a restricted way, for the last 35 years, then the heavens are not going to fall if the locks of the gates are removed. The District Magistrate has stated before me today that the members of the Muslim community are not allowed to offer prayer at the disputed site. They are not allowed to go there.*

In view of the application alone as well as of the recorded evidence, the foregoing judgement could be called 'just', but not completely so if we take the overall situation regarding the contentious structure. If the court felt that the gates should be unlocked, it should have considered the circumstances in which they had been locked in the first place. It would have been more justified if it had ordered the local administration to restore the status quo as on 22–23 December 1949. This would have meant restoring the Imam in the Babri Masjid and also allowing the *kirtan* to continue outside the mosque around the *Ram Chabutra*.

Let us briefly recapitulate the developments in 1949 and thereafter:

In early December 1949, the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy gained momentum. A few local Mahants decided to recite the *Ramcharitmanas* at the Hanuman Garhi. A large crowd gathered to listen. Swami Karpatriji, Baba Raghavdas, Baba Ramdas, Mahant Digvijainath and several others spoke on the occasion. They suggested a similar recitation should be initiated in front of the Babri Masjid (which they referred to as the Shri

Ramjanambhoomi). It was immediately announced that the recitation of the Hindu sacred book would be started on the day commemorating the marriage of Shri Rama. Consequently, a large crowd congregated at the Babri Masjid. This naturally created excitement among the people and talk of the liberation of the Ramjanambhoomi apparently became common.

The Muslim population of Ayodhya was disturbed to observe the growing militancy of the Hindus. This seemed to confirm their fears that the Hindus were organising themselves to seize control of the Babri Masjid. In an attempt to forestall this, a delegation of local Muslims requested the District Magistrate to immediately stop the recitation of the *kirtan*. However, the District Magistrate asked the City Magistrate, Mr Gurudatt Singh, to enquire into the matter. Mr Gurudatt Singh realised that the situation was gradually turning explosive. He therefore requested the *Mahants* to end the recitation but no one paid any attention to him. In fact, the chanting of the Hindu holy texts continued with greater intensity.

The Muslims were further agitated as they interpreted this as a failure of the local administration to contain the situation. They decided to take forceful action to thwart the takeover of the Babri Masjid. Another delegation was organised and the District Magistrate was asked to take strict action against the *Mahants*. They alleged that Muslim graves were being dug up by the Hindus under the garb of *akhand kirtan*. The Magistrate asked the local police to take action and a few people were apprehended. However, the arrested persons were soon released as no case could be constituted against them. The Muslims, encouraged by the swift action of the police, requested the District Magistrate to provide them with security during their Friday prayers at the Babri Masjid. They may have hoped this would demonstrate their control. However, only eighty to eighty-five persons came to offer prayers.

About a week later came the significant incident of 22–23 December 1949. On the morning of 23 December, the cry suddenly went up that an image of Rama had appeared inside the mosque out of nowhere. The Hindus were jubilant and the belief spread that Rama had appeared to claim the place of his birth. The Hindus and the Muslims gave different versions about the miraculous appearance of the idol. The Hindus claim that their version is

corroborated by the report submitted by a Muslim constable on duty at the police outpost opposite the Babri Masjid on the night of 22–23 December 1949. According to them, the report says that on that night, the constable suddenly saw a very bright glow inside the mosque. On closer inspection he saw a dark, luminous and very beautiful child playing inside the mosque. He was so struck by the apparition that he fell unconscious. When he regained consciousness, he found a large number of people chanting 'Rama' and the idol of Shri Rama inside the mosque. There is, however, no such story in the police records.

The local Muslims relate an entirely different story. They say that a Hindu mendicant came to the mosque in the early hours of 23 December. He took a round of the central sanctum and another person carrying a bag suddenly appeared from nowhere. The person with the bag took out an idol of Shri Rama and started shouting that Shri Rama had appeared. Soon after this, the District Magistrate came and asked the Imam of the Babri Masjid to leave the precincts of the mosque immediately. This version is supported partially by the old Imam of the Babri Masjid, who is still alive and lives in Ayodhya.

The actual police report gives a very different version of the happenings. Mata Prasad, a constable, submitted a report to the police station at Ayodhya. We give a translation of the First Information Report lodged by Sub-Inspector Ram Dubey, Police Station Ayodhya, on 23 December 1949:

> *According to Mata Prasad [Paper No. 7] 'when I reached the Janambhoomi around 8 o'clock in the morning, I came to know that a group of 50–60 persons had entered the Babri Mosque after breaking the compound gate lock of the mosque or by jumping across the walls [of the compound] with a stair and established therein an idol of Shri Bhagwan and painted Sita Ram, etc., on the outer and inner walls with geru [red-loam]. Hans Raj, who was on duty, asked them to defer but they did not. These persons had already entered the mosque before the available PAC [Provincial Armed Constabulary] guards could be commanded. Officials of the district administration came to the site and involved themselves in making necessary arrangements. Afterwards, a crowd of 5–6,000 persons gathered outside and while chanting bhajans and*

raising religious slogans tried to enter the mosque but were deterred and nothing untoward happened thereon because of proper arrangements. Ram Dass, Ram Shakti Dass and 50–60 unidentified others entered the mosque surreptitiously and defiled its sanctity. Government servants on duty and several other were witness to it. Therefore it is written and filed.' Mata Prasad's report ends here.

On the basis of the report, the District Magistrate, K.K. Nayar, sent the following message to the Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary and the Home Secretary at 10.30 a.m. on 23 December 1949: 'A few Hindus entered Babri Masjid at night when the Masjid was deserted and installed a deity there. D.M. and S.P. and force at spot. Situation under control.' A police picket of fifteen personnel was on duty that night who, however, did not intervene in the situation.

The Chief Secretary, Bhagwan Sahay, and the Inspector-General of Police, V.N. Lahiri, promptly issued instructions for the immediate removal of the idols. K.K. Nayar, the District Magistrate, successfully stalled action, pleading the excuse of the 'suffering which it will entail to many innocent lives'. He declared the area 'disturbed' and imposed Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code to maintain law and order. He asked the Imam of the Babri Masjid to leave the premises of the mosque and then had the Masjid locked immediately. However, he made certain concessions. He allowed four *pujaris* (priests) and one *bhandari* (cook) to enter the inner sanctum of the mosque so as to perform the ritual of *aarti* in the morning and evening. The Hindu devotees of Shri Rama were allowed to have a *darshan* (view) of the statues from behind the grill. On 29 December 1949, the Magistrate, acting under S. 145 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, passed an order which did not restore possession of the mosque to the Imam but appointed a receiver to prevent 'breach of the peace' and also ordered attachment of the building. The chairman of the Municipal Board, Faizabad, Mr Priya Datt Ram, became the receiver of the Ramjanambhoomi/Babri Masjid.

Muslims living in Ayodhya were greatly disturbed and a delegation went to meet the Prime Minister. They requested him to order the removal of the statues from the mosque. Jawaharlal Nehru asked

the Government of U.P. to adopt strict measures for their removal. At this juncture a civil suit was filed on 16 January 1950 by one Gopal Singh Visharad for a declaration of the right to worship. The civil judge restrained the removal of the idols and ordered no interference with the *puja* as going on at present. The sole issue was whether the right to *puja* was restricted or unfettered. The issue of the restoration of the mosque was altogether ignored. This is clear from the judgement of 3 March 1951: 'The undisputed fact remains that on the date of this suit the idols of Shri Bhagwan Ram Chandra and others did exist.'

However, in his written statement '*on behalf of the state of Uttar Pradesh*' filed before the civil judge on 24 April 1950, the District Magistrate of Faizabad, J.N. Ugra, said in paragraph 12:

> *The property in suit is known as Babri Masjid and it has been for a long period in use as a mosque for the purpose of worship by the Muslims. It has not been in use as a temple of Shri Ram Chandraji.*

In paragraph 13, he stated that on 22 December 1949 'the idols of Shri Ram Chandraji had been surreptitiously and wrongly put inside.'

Thereafter, from 1951 to 1986, things remained relatively quiet in Faizabad. It was on 1 February 1986—when the locks of the Babri Masjid were opened by the Ayodhya Police Station Officer, Mr V.P. Singh—that the situation started becoming tense. The Bajrang Dal, a militant wing of the Hindu movement, emerged and vowed to liberate the Shri Ramjanambhoomi. The Muslims also began to organise themselves and formed the Babri Masjid Action Committee. In Delhi, a militant organisation of Muslim youths called the 'Adam Sena' emerged. These developments naturally did not augur well for the communal situation as a whole.

The period between 1 February 1986, the day of the opening of locks, and 9 November 1989, the day of the *Shilanayas* (laying of the foundation-stone) of the Shri Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya, has been primarily a period when the state has openly supported the cause of one community. It seems evident that the U.P. Government was convinced that the controversial building stood on the spot of the Shri Ramjanambhoomi. CRPF (Central

Reserve Police Force) jawans were posted in large numbers around the mosque. The jawans seemed to feel that they were actually reincarnations in khakhi uniform of *Hanuman*, keeping vigil over the birthplace of Shri Rama. The CRPF Inspector told us that he had been posted to see that no one attacked the contentious building. But, it was clear that the CRPF was there to stop any trouble incited by the Muslims.

We were struck by an incident which we witnessed in the mosque in June 1987. A sudden shout went up in the air, '*kathmulla aa gaya*' ('a Muslim has entered'). Several people ran and soon dragged in a person wearing a *tahmad* and a vest. The police intervened before the person was assaulted.

The present work is a historical study of the religious tangle in Ayodhya. The primary effort of the book is to date the origin and chart the progress of the conflict regarding the issues surrounding the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy. I have tried to distinguish between local myths and historical facts. This study is not concerned with the historicity of Rama. Instead, it is an attempt to piece together the events connected with the dispute over the site.

At times, I have gone further back into history to explore some popular local myths. The Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy has grown out of such local myths which have been in circulation for a long period and have assumed the dimension of historical facts even if for many people they are not, at times, supported by reason. For example, there are two different places in Ayodhya where Rama's birth is said to have taken place. The place where Rama is said to have been born of his mother, Kaushalya, is called the Janamasthan, while the place where the divine transformation is said to have taken place and where he assumed human form on earth is called the Janambhoomi. We must make a distinction between *sthan* (place) and *bhoomi* (area of land), but it seems that in Ayodhya questions of faith have no place for reason. Again, it is surprising that Vikramaditya chose to glorify the spot where Rama took human form on earth and not the place where he was born from his mother's womb.

Several questions arise when one is actually confronted by the

available historical data on Ayodhya. The questions are: What really was the disputed place of worship? Was it a temple consecrating the birthplace of Rama or, for that matter, was the mosque constructed at the behest of the Mughal emperor, Babur?

Only an objective historical enquiry can provide the answers. After tracing the origin and spread of the dispute (Chapter Two), we shall review the rise of Hindu revivalism in Avadh (Chapter Three). In Chapters Four and Five, we shall examine the history of Ayodhya before Babur and question the popular notion that Babur constructed the contentious mosque by dating the construction and deducing the source of the materials used in it. In Chapter Six, we explore the question of where a Ramjanambhoomi temple might actually have been situated. In the last chapter, we shall unravel the mystery of what really existed on the site before the Masjid.

Chapter Two

Genesis of the Conflict

Society under the Nawabs of Avadh was harmoniously adjusted, despite the striking differences in religion and race between the ruling class and the common people. The ruling class was well-knit and had a culture that, in later years, became representative of the entire province. Because of this, religious differences were either undermined or overlooked. All festivals were celebrated irrespective of religious denomination. In several cases, both Hindus and Muslims revered the same *peer* or *sant*. There were several well-known *mazaars* where people of all faiths sought succour in times of difficulty. It was typical of Avadh that several thousand Hindus attended the annual *urs* at the *mazaar* of Syed Salar Masud.[1] In Faizabad the festival of *mehndi* was celebrated with equal fervour by Hindus and Muslims.[2] The ruling class celebrated all religious festivals and received a customary due called the *nazar* from the people.[3] It was common to find a *chabutra* (platform) in front of a noble's house. The *chabutra* was the venue for the ceremonial receiving of gifts from the people and also provided a place for the *tazias* of the village to gather during *Muharram*.[4] However, it was *Muharram* alone that was patronized by the state. Everyone who was not a Shia but held some position in the kingdom observed the period of retreat before *Muharram*. These customs had become so deep-rooted that people continued to observe them even after the end of Nawabi rule in Avadh.[5] It might be added that economic motives were extremely significant in the observance of these customs. The landlords continued to observe them irrespective of their religion because of the *nazar* they received.[6]

The kingdom of Avadh did not experience any serious religious

conflict till the nineteenth century. The first recorded incident of a bloody conflict between the Hindus and Muslims occurred during the years 1853–55.[7] This was the direct outcome of the rival claims raised by the Hindus and Muslims over a particular spot of worship in Ayodhya. The *Bairagis* of the Hanuman Garhi claimed that Rama had been born at the site of the Babri Masjid. This claim apparently had no basis. Earlier the mosque in question had been known as the 'Jami Masjid' or the 'Sita Rasoi Masjid'. It was only after this conflict that the mosque was inevitably referred to as the 'Babri Masjid'.

The flare-up in Ayodhya closely followed the completion of the report on the conditions in Avadh by Colonel Sleeman, the British Resident in Lucknow. It was on the basis of this report that the annexation of Avadh was completed by the East India Company. Colonel Sleeman had toured the Kingdom of Avadh in the early 1850s and observed that the law and order situation in the kingdom was shameful. He gave several instances to show that the authority of the Nawab was virtually non-existent in the countryside, and life and property in the towns were insecure. At the same time, he described the great respect and faith which people had in the authority of the British Resident in Lucknow. Sleeman also said that there were striking inequalities between Shias and others in the administrative, fiscal and legal systems of the kingdom.[8] That Sleeman's observations were biased is obvious if we compare his account with other contemporary observations.

P.D. Reeves and John Pemble both contend that Sleeman's report was not an accurate narration.[9] R. Mukherjee observes that resentment against the British was a popular phenomenon and had penetrated into the villages. This culminated in the uprisings of 1857–58.[10] In an attempt to justify the annexation of Avadh, the British authorities exploited the conflict arising out of the controversy over the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi. One official contended:

> *Shortly before annexation, an incident occurred in this district [Fyzabad] which may well be recorded as illustrative of the state of anarchy that then prevailed: unless the utter weakness of the Government be borne in mind, such an occurrence would appear impossible.*[11]

A detailed account of the first bloody conflict over the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi issue was given by H.J. Boas. (This narrative was confirmed by Rai Mahadeo Bali, Taluqadar of Rampur in Pargana Daryabad, District Bara Banki.)[12] According to the report, the event occurred in 1853 and the cause was the recurrent disputes that had been arising for some time between the Hindu *Mahants* and the Muslims of Ayodhya over the ground on which the Babri Masjid stood. Before the incident, the belief had spread among the Hindu priests that the *Janamasthan* temple had been destroyed by the Mughal Emperor, Babur, who had then had a mosque constructed in its place. Although Aurangzeb was also said to have desecrated some temples in Ayodhya and had them converted into mosques, in 1853 the *Mahants* chose to reclaim only the *Janamasthan*. The explanation of the British officials was that the mosques of Aurangzeb were not contested because they had fallen into decay and were not considered worth a struggle. The very ground on which the Babri Masjid stood was considered extremely sacred by the Hindus, which is why it became an issue with the *Bairagis* at once.[13] According to Boas, the *Bairagis* easily took possession of the Babri Masjid in 1853. The situation grew worse when one of the *Mahants* was expelled from the brotherhood. He proceeded to Lucknow where he embraced Islam in revenge. He spread the rumour that the Hindus had destroyed the Babri Masjid.

The expelled *Mahant* came in close contact with Moulvi Amir Ali in Lucknow. The Moulvi was in the capital for the renewal of the rent-free land grant made to his ancestor Sheikh Bandagi Mian, a famous Sufi saint of Amethi, by Emperor Akbar.[14] When he met the angry *Mahant*, the Moulvi had been trying to approach the royal court. He thought the issue of the Babri Masjid would enhance his status and place him in a better position to bargain for the grant.

Moulvi Amir Ali returned to Amethi and declared a *jehad* for the liberation of the Babri Masjid. He also demanded the destruction of the Hanuman Garhi. The Moulvi was popular in Ayodhya and was able to amass a well-armed force comprising largely of Muslims and some low-caste Hindus. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was disturbed to learn of the march of Moulvi Amir Ali towards

Ayodhya. He demanded an immediate report on the events in Faizabad. Meanwhile, he asked Badrir-ud-daulah of Amethi to stall the forces of the Moulvi and to bring him to Lucknow for talks. The Nawab wanted to avert any kind of conflict. He also declared that the mosque in question was to be restored to the Imam who had been looking after it before it had been seized by the *Bairagis*. The situation remained the same for a month, despite the Nawab's orders and the stalling of the march of Amir Ali. Soon, the Moulvi became impatient and again marched his forces to Daryabad, a place between Faizabad and Amethi, and remained there for twenty days.

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah appealed to the British Resident to take action in Ayodhya. The *mahal* of Ayodhya had been transferred to the British under the terms of the Treaty of 1819 and was their responsibility.[15] Since the British refused to take any action, the Nawab ordered four *muftis* to march towards the camp of the Moulvi. Panic was immediately let loose in the Moulvi's camp and more than half the mercenary soldiers deserted him. The remainder continued to march towards Ayodhya. They re-asserted their intention to destroy the Hanuman Garhi, the main centre of the *Bairagis*.

Colonel Barlow (called Captain Boilieu by Benet), who commanded the first regiment of the Oudh Irregular Infantry, was ordered to arrest the progress of the Moulvi and his forces. Colonel Barlow, assisted by Rai Abhayram Bali of Rampur, met the forces of the Moulvi at Shujaganj, a large market on the high road to Ayodhya. The encounter between the two forces was a desperate one and continued for three hours. The insurgent forces were said to have numbered about two thousand men, while the Nawab's forces consisted of one regiment and two guns. The armed conflict was decided in favour of Barlow because of the flanking movement of his army. The rebels were surrounded by Raja Sher Bahadur Singh of Kamiar, Thakur Singh (an employee of the Nawab) and the sepoys of Rai Abhayram Bali. They fled after a large number of them had been killed. Estimates of their loss varied between 120 and 700 men. The First Irregular Infantry, on the other hand, was almost decimated. Moulvi Amir Ali was slain in the act of prayer and his head was sent to the Nawab in

Lucknow. However, the popularity of Amir Ali as a local hero continued unabated. He came to be revered as a martyr and an annual fair was held in his memory at Rahimgunj in Rudauli, District Bara Banki, for some years after the annexation of Avadh. It was attended by both Hindus and Muslims but, by 1905, it was no longer held regularly.[16]

In Ayodhya, the situation remained as it had been at the end of 1853. The Hindu *Mahants* continued to occupy the Babri Masjid. At the beginning of 1855, fighting once again flared up in Ayodhya. This time the Muslims re-occupied the Babri Masjid by force and chased the Hindu *Mahants* away. They made a charge at the steps of the Hanuman Garhi temple as well but were driven back, with a heavy loss in human lives. The Hindus under the *Bairagis* made a counter-attack and stormed the Babri Masjid. At the gate of the mosque, seventy-five Muslims were killed fighting to protect the Masjid. They were buried at the spot of their death, which came to be called the *Ganj-i-Shahidan* ('martyrs' resting-place').

The repeated bloody conflicts disturbed the Nawab and the local population. There was a general demand for the restoration of peace in Ayodhya. The elders of the two warring communities decided to sit together and work out a compromise. They even invited the British Resident to preside over the discussions. The British held that the Resident had been requested to attend because the people had greater faith and respect for British authority. Actually, by the treaty of 1819, Ayodhya had been transferred to the British Resident. Although Ayodhya continued to be a part of the sovereign state of Avadh, for administrative and revenue matters it was under the control of the British Resident. It was decided by the elders that the members of the two communities had to be allowed to worship at the same place. The building itself was to be used as a mosque where prayers were to be offered by the Muslims and the Hindus were to worship in front of the mosque. This arrangement continued when the British annexed Avadh on 13 February 1856[17] and was extended further up to the great uprisings of 1857–58.

In Faizabad the 'Sepoy Mutiny' of 1857 was quickly transformed into a popular uprising. British life and property became unsafe. The *Bairagis* of the Hanuman Garhi provided shelter and helped

the British officials and their families to escape to Gonda.[18] After the suppression of the great uprisings in 1858, the British declared a policy of rewarding all those who had helped them. As a consequence, Raja Mansingh of Ayodhya and the *Bairagis* received handsome grants from the government.[19]

It was during this time that the issue of Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi was raised once again. The local administration contended that the communal situation in Ayodhya had remained volatile since 1855 and as such a bloody conflict between Hindus and Muslims was imminent. It was therefore necessary to revise the settlement on the issue. The British officials argued that as the matter was extremely sensitive, it was necessary to physically demarcate the places of worship of the two religious communities.

The new arrangement was worked out by the local administration and it allowed the Hindu *Mahants* to raise a platform in front of the mosque to mark the birthplace of Shri Rama. This was easily allowed because all the land in Ayodhya was *nazul*.[20] A grilled fence was put up between the mosque and the raised platform. The Hindus were forbidden access to the inner yard of the mosque and were required to make their offerings before the platform in the outer enclosure. The entry from the eastern gate was denied to the Muslims who desired to offer their prayers in the Babri Masjid. They were now to enter the mosque from the north gate alone. (The north gate of the Babri Masjid seems incongruous with the rest of the building. It appears to be a more recent construction. We might therefore assume that it might have been constructed during the time when the places of worship of the two communities had been physically separated.)

It is quite clear that the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi issue actually emerged as the major source of conflict between the Hindus and Muslims after 1855. After this time, each community started claiming spiritual superiority for its faith and, in the process, recounted several miracles performed by its saints. Myths were used to justify their contentions. Inflammatory literature was brought out by the two communities. The Hindus attributed several miracles to the Janamasthan temple, which they alleged Babur had destroyed. The Muslims, on the other hand, extended their claim to include the Hanuman Garhi, which they said was

raised on the ruins of a mosque constructed during the reign of Aurangzeb.[21]

The contrary claims raised by the Hindus and Muslims naturally vitiated the communal environment in Faizabad. However, both the Hindu and Muslim protagonists were unable to marshal any facts to support their cases. I am convinced that before the second half of the nineteenth century the idea that the Mughal emperors had desecrated Hindu holy places was quite unknown. It was with the advent of the British in Ayodhya that this belief started spreading. The earliest mention of the misdeeds of the Mughals was made by a British officer in 1838. Montgomery Martin had been deputed by the East India Company to provide extensive information on eastern India. He undertook the official survey of eastern India and, while making a study of the district of Gorakhpur, he also visited Ayodhya and Faizabad and recorded his observations. He wrote:

> *The destruction [of the Hindu temples] is very generally attributed by the Hindus to the furious zeal of Aurungzebe, to whom also is imputed the overthrow of the Temples in Benares and Mathura. What may have been the case in the two latter, I shall not now take upon myself to say, but with respect to Ayodhya the tradition seems ill-founded. The bigot, by whom the temples were destroyed, is said to have erected mosques on the situations of the most remarkable temples; but the mosque at Ayodhya, which is by far the most entire, and which has the appearance of being the most modern ... .*[22]

Montgomery Martin does not seem to have believed that there still existed in Ayodhya the remains of the temples that had been restored by a Hindu king, Vikrama. He was apparently convinced that the prevalent myths regarding the holy city of Ayodhya could not be supported by reason and history. However, he did point out the presence of non-Islamic pillars in a mosque. He wrote:

> *... are some pillars in the mosque built by Babur. These are of black stone, and of an order which I have seen nowhere else ... . That they have been taken from a Hindu building, is evident from the traces of images being cut off to satisfy the conscience of the bigot. It is possible*

> *that these pillars had belonged to a temple built by Vikrama; but I think the existence of such temples doubtful; and, if they did not exist, it is probable that the pillars have been taken from the ruins of the palace. They are only 6 feet high.*[23]

In 1860, a rationale was given for the destructive activities of the Mughal emperors. P. Carnegy, a British officer of the Bengal Civil Service stationed in Faizabad, wrote:

> *It is said that at the time of Muslim conquest there were three important Hindu shrines and little else, the Janamasthan temple, the Swargaddwar and Treta-ke-Thakur. The Janamasthan was in Ramkot and marked the birthplace of Rama. It seems that in AD 1528, Babur visited Ayodhya and under his orders this ancient temple was destroyed and on its site was built what came to be known as Babur's mosque. The material of the old temple was largely employed in building the mosque and a few of the original columns are all in good preservation. Subsequently Aurangzeb also desecrated the shrines of Ayodhya which led to prolonged bitterness between the Hindus and Muslims.*

Carnegy observed that the destruction of the Hindu temples and its replacement by mosques was carried out 'according to the well-known Muhammadan principle of enforcing their religion on all those whom they had conquered'.[24]

The observations of these two officers clearly indicate a change in the British attitude towards local myths. In 1838, Montgomery Martin had expressed his suspicions regarding the stories but, in 1860, P. Carnegy seems to believe them. However, it is clear that by 1838 the idea that Hindu shrines had been desecrated by Mughal emperors who had constructed mosques on the ruins was generally accepted. The British administrators seemed to believe that Hindus and Muslims were naturally opposed to each other and, as a result, they saw local society as deeply divided. They were convinced that the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi dispute was closely related to the growing communal tensions. We shall examine when and how the local traditions, unsubstantiated by historical facts, came into circulation and, also, the intentions of the British rulers in this region of North India.

The earliest mention that the Mughal emperors defiled Hindu places of worship in Ayodhya is found in the writings of British officials, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Till this time, no Indian or foreign traveller, observer or historian had made any mention of the Janamasthan temple in Ayodhya. It is certain that if there had been a temple commemorating the birthplace of Rama, it would have been extremely famous. Yet the Chinese and Arab travellers who came to Ayodhya up to the fifteenth century make no mention of it.[25]

William Finch, the first European visitor to the city, came to Ayodhya between 1608 and 1611. He tells us about the bathing *ghats* and the fort of Rama, then in ruins. He relates the popular belief that Rama, who is considered to be the incarnation of God, assumed human form in Ayodhya to see the *tamasha* of the world. He gives an account of the *Swargaddwar* which, according to him, was believed to be the place where Rama's ashes were buried.[26] William Finch does not say anything either about the mosque constructed by Babur or the Ramjanambhoomi temple deemed to have been constructed by Bikramjeet or Vikramaditya. In the early nineteenth century, Bishop Heber made a journey through northern India. He made no mention of the Ramjanambhoomi temple either, although he provided information about religious affairs in Benares.[27]

We have several contemporary historical accounts of Ayodhya till the nineteenth century, but none of them makes any mention of either the Ramjanambhoomi temple or the Babri Masjid. We may examine the accounts of two authorities, both of whom wrote after Babur. Abul Fazl accompanied Akbar on his tour of Ayodhya. In both the *Akbar Namah* and the *Ain-i-Akbari*, he writes about Ayodhya and mentions the popular belief that Rama was born in that city. He says that Ayodhya was also known as 'Ramjanambhoomi'.

In the early nineteenth century, Mohammad Faiz Baksh was commissioned by Darab Ali Khan to write the history of Faizabad, which he called the *Tarikh-Farahbaksh*. In it, he narrates in detail the happenings in Delhi from the time of Amir Taimur Ghazi Gorkani up to 1720, when Burhan-ul-mulk was sent to Avadh. He

also gives us an elaborate history of the events and happenings in Faizabad during the years 1720 to 1819. Mohammad Faiz Baksh does not mention the Ramjanambhoomi–Babri Masjid controversy although he gives us a detailed account of Ayodhya. The memoirs do not describe any conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Thus, the stories which gained credence among British officials seem to have become popular only in the nineteenth century.

The unquestioning belief in the absolute superiority of the Christian religion and of Western civilisation led the colonial authorities to belittle everything Indian—its traditions, literature, philosophy, institutions, and history. Indian poets like Kalidasa, Kabir, Meer Taqi Meer, Amir Khusrau and Ghalib were declared inferior to Western poets.[28] A corollary was the denigration of the Mughal Empire. They projected the Mughal emperors as religious fanatics. By that logic, the advent of the British brought liberation to the Hindus from the persecution of Muslim rulers.

The Mughals were also undermined by the Nawabs of Avadh and the growing force of Hindu revivalism. After the Battle of Buxar (1764), Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah was forced to conclude a treaty of subsidiary alliance with the East India Company on 16 August 1765. In 1773 he conceded the Fort of Chunar to the British and agreed to the stationing of a British Resident in the capital in exchange for British military assistance against the Rohillas. In 1795 the districts of Benares and Ghazipur and in 1792 the Fort of Allahabad were ceded to the British East India Company. The *Tarikh-Farahbaksh* observes that after the Battle of Buxar, Nawab Shuja-ud-daulah started to deliberately undermine Mughal influence in Faizabad. This was done to please the British. The Nawab ordered the strong force of Mewati soldiers to leave Ayodhya and Faizabad.[29] The Mewatis were Meo converts to Islam and loyal soldiers of the Mughal rulers. Immediately after their departure the local administration started to collapse, particularly in Ayodhya, and local disturbances increased.

For Avadh, emancipation from Delhi was followed closely by subjugation to Calcutta. In 1773 the Nawab surrendered control of his foreign policy to the British. During the rule of Warren Hastings in India (1772–85), the interference of the British Resident in the

affairs of the court increased, to the extent of dethroning the Nawab in 1798 and replacing him by another. The Governor-General, Sir John Shore, removed Wazir Ali from the throne, ostensibly because he was believed not to be the legitimate son of Asaf-ud-daulah, but in reality because he promised to be an intractable ally, whereas the rival claimant, Saadat Ali Khan (bro her of Asaf-ud-daulah) offered attractive terms as incentives for his elevation to the throne. Thereafter the validity of the succession always depended upon recognition by British authorities. The British wanted to control the whole of North India through Avadh. For Avadh, the rise of British influence was inevitable because of the growing rift between the Nawab, the nobility, and the dowager Begams of Avadh, who also controlled some *parganas*.

It was largely as a result of encouragement from the Governor-General that the Nawab decided to assume the title of king in 1819. In 1816 there had been anti-British riots among the Muslim population of Bareilly in Rohilkhand, and these had made Governor-General Hastings alive to the possible effect that an appeal to Muslim religious susceptibilities might have on British authority in the north. The probability of such an appeal was increased by the animosity towards the British of Prince Jahangir, third in the line to the Mughal throne. It was in order to drive a wedge between the courts of Delhi and Avadh and thus obviate the possibilities of an anti-British alliance, that Lord Hastings honoured the Nawab's disposition to renounce his traditional allegiance and proclaim himself sovereign. The British inspiration behind the coronation ceremony of October 1819 was reflected in a curious way, for the court musicians signalled the crowning of the new monarch not with some native anthem, but with *God save the King*.[30]

The growing influence of the British in the court of Avadh was accompanied by a desire to control the general administration of the kingdom. This culminated in the annexation of Avadh in 1856. The general policy of the British to keep their subjects the Hindus and Muslims divided was apparently an outcome of their experience of the riots in Bareilly in 1816. The local population had risen under the leadership of the Pathans and had nearly massacred the

British stationed there. The British were convinced that the Hindus had been oppressed by the Muslim rulers and that the British had liberated them. This logic is evident in their writing on India in the nineteenth century. With regard to Faizabad and Ayodhya, one British officer observed:

> *The presence of a Muslim governor and his court contrived to keep the Hindu shrines continually in the background ... . With the departure of the court, the Hindus there kept to themselves and numerous temples and monasteries sprang into existence.*[31]

Colonel Sleeman shared the same prejudice. The general picture of Avadh that emerges from his account is of a suffering Hindu peasantry oppressed and starved by the profligate and maleficent Muslim administration.[32]

It is clear that the general intent of British policy in Avadh was to keep the population divided. This was achieved largely by encouraging the Hindu reaction against Muslims. This attitude was strengthened after the experience of Indian affairs during and after the uprisings of 1857. The rise and growth of the *Wahabi* movement convinced them further of the logic of religious division. The *Wahabis* believed that Western influence had polluted Indian society and it was necessary to draw the people away from it. They preached religious orthodoxy. The British were shocked by the intensity of the movement. They tried to counter it by getting the Sultan of Turkey to appeal to the Muslims to give up resistance to the British. But despite the Sultan's call, the movement continued to grow. The British adopted other ways to counter the alarming proportions of the *Wahabis*, including the encouragement of a parallel growth of Hindu revivalism.

The rumour was circulated that the *Wahabis* were trying to undermine Hinduism. In fact, the *Wahabi* attempt to purify Islam by opposing Western influence was interpreted as an attempt to do away with all 'outside' influences particularly Hindu influences. The British unnecessarily allowed Hindu revivalism to grow as a counter-force to Muslim fundamentalism. As a result, jealousies and hatred started growing among the two religious communities.

Notes and References

1. W.C. Benet gives a detailed account of the popularity of the *mazaar* of Syed Salar Masud in district Bahraich. See W.C. Benet ed., *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, 3 Volumes, Calcutta, 1877, Vol. II, pp. 110–16.
2. W.W. Hoey, trans., *Tarikh-Farahbaksh* by Muhammad Faiz Baksh, Allahabad, 1889.
3. Sushil Srivastava, 'Wajib-ul-arz as a Source of Social and Economic Conditions of a Village in North India in the 19th century,' in *Proceedings of the Seminar on Sources of Social and Economic History of North India*, Allahabad University, 1985.
4. Ibid.
5. H.C. Irwin, *The Garden of India or Chapters on Oudh History and Affairs*, London, 1880, p. 186.
6. Sushil Srivastava, op. cit.
7. See W.C. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 462, and H.R. Nevill, *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Fyzabad* (henceforth Nevill's *Fyzabad Gazetteer*), Allahabad, 1905, p. 175.
8. W.H. Sleeman, *Journey Through the Kingdom of Oude*, 2 Volumes, London, 1856, Vol. II, p. 143.
9. See P.D. Reeves (edited with an introduction and notes), *Sleeman in Oudh. An Abridgement of W.H. Sleeman's 'Journey Through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849–50'*, Cambridge, 1971, Introduction, and John Pemble, *The Raj, The Indian Mutiny and the Kingdom of Oudh, 1801–1859*, New Delhi, 1977.
10. See R. Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt, 1857–58: A Study of Popular Resistance*, New Delhi, 1984, p. 173.
11. See W.C. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 462.
12. See *The Pioneer* dated 20 June 1902. See also H.R. Nevill ed., *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Bara Banki*, Allahabad, 1905 (henceforth Nevill's *Bara Banki Gazetteer*).
13. P. Carnegy, *A Historical Sketch of Faizabad Tahsil, Including the Capital of Ayodhya and Faizabad*, Allahabad, 1866, pp. 168–69.
14. See W.C. Benet, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 43.
15. W.C. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 12–13. In the *Tarikh-Farahbaksh*, Mohd. Faiz Baksh writes that the transferred *mahals* had been placed for administrative and revenue purposes under the care of the Resident (p. 169).
16. Nevill's *Bara Banki Gazetteer*, p. 170.
17. W.C. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 7. See also Nevill's *Fyzabad Gazetteer*, p. 174.
18. Nevill's *Fyzabad Gazetteer*, p. 163.
19. Ibid., p. 77.
20. Ibid., pp. 138–39.
21. See Kamal-ud-din Hyder Husaini, *Tawarikh-i-Avadh*, Lucknow, 1879.
22. Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, comprising the Districts of Behar, Shahabad, Bhagulpoor, Goruckpoor, Dinajpur, Puraniya, Ranggopoor, and Assam*, 6 volumes, Vol. III: *Bhagalpoor, Goruckpoor*, London, 1838, pp. 334–35.

23. Ibid., pp. 336–37.
24. P. Carnegy, op. cit., p. 17.
25. The temple commemorating the birthplace of Rama does not find any mention in any of the accounts of foreign travellers. For example, the two Chinese travellers, who came to India, Fa-hein and Huen-tsang, had nothing to say about it. The Jaina texts give us an account of Ayodhya but make no mention of the temple. Ibn Batuta, who travelled in North India in the fourteenth century, visited Avadh but does not mention the Ramjanambhoomi temple either.
26. William Foster ed., *Early Travels in India, 1583–1619*, London, 1921, p. 176.
27. See R. Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, London, 1829.
28. S.R. Faruqi in a lecture on 'Urdu Poetry' delivered at Allahabad University on 30 October 1986.
29. W.W. Hoey, trans., op. cit., p. 78.
30. John Pemble, op. cit., p. 136.
31. P. Carnegy, op. cit., p. 17.
32. W.H. Sleeman, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 144.

Chapter Three

British Policy and Religious Revivalism in Avadh

In the nineteenth century the British attitude towards India and its society was greatly influenced by the views of James Stuart Mill in his voluminous *History of India*. His ideas were disseminated by the Utilitarians and the Evangelists in Britain. British administrators posted in India were generally products of Cambridge University where the teaching faculty was dominated by these schools of thought. Thus, most of the administrators in the early part of the nineteenth century came to India with a mission to ameliorate the conditions of the uncivilised Indians. They believed that only Christianity and Westernisation could uplift the Indians from the morass of backwardness.

The colonial authorities believed Mill's assumption that Indian society was divided into Hindus and Muslims, who were strictly separate in both religion and society. To accentuate the differences between the two communities, Mill demarcated historical development in India into two periods—the Hindu Period and the Muhammedan Period. Both Hindus and Muslims were declared non-political and lacking in a secular outlook. Hindus were allegedly not concerned with politics because they were absorbed in spiritual matters. A Hindu could hardly conceive of, and would definitely shun, a way of life that postulated a distinction between the sacred and the secular. For a Muslim, all non-Islamic governments were immoral in general. Islam was said to have a tradition of bigotry and intolerance, while Hinduism had a degree of respect for all religions.

Thus, the British were surprised to find that despite Muslim rule in Avadh, Hindus had been living peacefully and Hinduism had not been undermined in the area. They reasoned that the comparatively few conversions in this area of Muslim political dominance was an eloquent testimony to the organic, protean and vital character of Hinduism, which had met the Muslim challenge by absorbing the most attractive (albeit heterodox) elements of Islam. This it had done without breaking its own essential spirit. Islam itself survived as a hothouse religion in Avadh, as in most of India. The British could not explain why else, outside the somewhat false atmosphere of the newer towns and garrisons, it never really established itself. Even the few significant conversions that it did achieve were confined to the Rajput elite class, and these, since they generally had political motives, were skin deep.[1] Somehow, the British refused to appreciate the cosmopolitan nature of society in Avadh.

The British were surprised to observe complete religious tolerance in the general behaviour of the people. Butter, a British Medical Officer posted in Sultanpur during the Nawabi regime observed that there existed great communal amity between the Hindus and Muslims.[2] Elliot, one of the first British Settlement Officers in Avadh, made critical observations on the life-styles of the converted Rajputs. He wrote:

> *In matters of eating and drinking, they are as particular about their caste as any Brahman. Many of them wear the dhoti and will greet a Hindu with the idolatrous salutation of 'Ram, Ram'. Almost all keep a pundit to fix the auspicious moment of commencing any enterprise, or foretell the nature of its results, and they believe in his predictions.'*

W.C. Benet, another British officer stationed in Avadh in the 1870s, observed:

> *Between the Khanzadas [Rajput converts] and Hindus almost no distinction can be drawn further than that the former say their prayers in a mosque and cut their coats to open from the right. The Khanzadas refuse to eat beef; they plaster their fireplaces before cooking, and very generally use brazen vessels.*[4]

There was no major divide between the two major religious groups. However, there did occur minor incidents of conflict, particularly in the two cities of Faizabad and Lucknow during the Nawabi period. These incidents were the natural outcome of a highly fractured society. Avadh society broadly comprised of Muslims and Hindus, but they were subdivided into Shia and Sunni Muslims and several sects of Hindus, the major ones being the Shaivas and Vaishnavas. After 1765 the position of the Sunni Muslims continued to deteriorate further.[5] This was natural as it coincided with the decline in the influence of the Mughal Empire in Avadh. The legal, fiscal and the administrative systems of Avadh came to accept the lower position of inequality of the Sunni Muslims and the Hindus in the kingdom. Conflicts came into the open during Muharram when both communities interpreted differently the sacrifice of Ali. Religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims were generally unknown. This was more so because, in Avadh, Hindus were treated with greater favour and sympathy than Sunni Muslims. The Shias, Sunnis and Hindus often worshipped together at the '*mazaar*' of a famous saint.[6] It was this that had maintained general amity between the Hindus and Muslims for a long time. The first major religious dispute between the two communities arose during the years 1853 and 1855.

Long before the occurrence of the first bloody conflict between the Hindus and Muslims, Hindu revivalist activity in Ayodhya had increased. It seems that the Shia Nawabs of Avadh gave their implicit support to this activity. In September 1722, Mir Muhammad Khan was appointed the governor of Avadh by the Mughal emperor, Muhammad Shah. He adopted the title of Saadat Khan Bahadur and consolidated the territories of Avadh by asserting a vigilant control over the refractory local chieftains. In Ayodhya, he rebuilt the old fort on the bank of river Ghagra and called it the Qila Mubarak. During his rule, Hindu buildings, such as temples and *ashrams*, were erected and a few Ramanandi *akharas* (sects) made their appearance. This coincided with the attempt of the Vaishnava sects to take back from the Shaivas some of the important religious places in Ayodhya. One of the last strongholds of the Shaivas, the Hanuman hill, was reconquered by Abhayram, a *Sadhu* belonging to the *Nirbani akhara* of the Ramanandi order, in

the days of Saadat Khan's successor, Abu-i-Mansoor Khan Safdar Jang (1739–1754).

The second Nawab moved his court from Ayodhya to Faizabad. In 1750 Ayodhya was virtually placed under the control of Naval Rai, a powerful minister of Nawab Safdar Jang. Naval Rai was a Hindu Kayastha and was sympathetic towards the Ramanandi sect. He erected several buildings along the Swargaddwar *ghat* prominent among which was the temple of Nageshwara. The British official version believes that in the absence of the Nawab's court and under the patronage of Naval Rai, Ayodhya was transformed from a Muslim to a Hindu town. This version cannot be accepted; Ayodhya never belonged to any particular religion. The shifting of the court from Ayodhya did not mean the creation of a favourable climate for Hindu activities, because the latter was the consequence of a new temper that had arisen with the Ramanandi sects.[7] However, it is true that after this time Vaishnava activity in Ayodhya became extensive and several settlements of sadhus sprang up. Carnegy himself observes, that during this period the foundations of several religious institutions were laid down. He gives a list of 209 Hindu religious institutions that came up in Ayodhya after 1750.[8]

Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah provided a regular income to the several *akharas* in Ayodhya through state patronage and bestowed liberal grants on them. However, it was during his time that the political situation in Ayodhya started undergoing a significant change. The Nawab had allowed his mother, popularly known as the Bahu Begam, to suspect his intentions towards herself. After the death of Shuja-ud-daulah in 1775, his widow, the Bahu Begam, had received several *mahals* for her maintenance. Soon after he was established as the Nawab, Asaf-ud-daulah shifted his capital to Lucknow. His mother, the Bahu Begam, and his grandmother, the Nawab Begam, stayed back in Faizabad and the Begams retained charge of the royal wealth left there. Asaf-ud-daulah is well-known for having been a poor administrator and a spendthrift Nawab, and he was always in search of ways to accumulate wealth. Aware of the huge wealth in store at Faizabad, he wanted to acquire it. His relations with the Begams soured over this. The Bahu Begam feared that, after her death, Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah

would neither maintain the mausoleum of her husband nor retain her several servants. In order to forestall this, she signed an agreement with the British Resident in 1816. The Bahu Begam received the assurance that after her death, the mausoleum of her husband and the servants would be cared for by the British. In exchange, she transferred the *mahals* assigned to her to the Resident.

The agreement of 1816 between the Bahu Begam and the Resident transferred the *mahal* of Haveli Avadh, which included Ayodhya, to the British. They became responsible for the collection of revenue and the maintenance of peace in Ayodhya. The take-over of the *mahals* coincided with the rise in the intensity of Hindu activity in Ayodhya. It was during these years that the Ramanandi sects succeeded in suppressing the Shaivas. Simultaneously, several new *akharas* were founded. The British Resident had no reason to stop these activities. In fact, they served the interests of the British who found more reason, after 1860, to support the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. The British had been profoundly disturbed by both the uprisings of 1857 and the Wahabi movement. Both had convinced them of the need for Hindu support. They reasoned that, Hindus being in the majority, their support was vital to the empire. The Muslims were aggrieved because they had lost political power to the British; the Wahabi movement was also directed against them. It was natural for them to support Hindu revivalism.

Hindu revivalism had distant roots in the revisionism of the Bhakti movement, whose leaders had been the *Sants* (saints). The role of the Hindu sect became important because of the changed political and religious situation in North India after the twelfth century.

The spread of Sufism and the egalitarianism of Islam induced a democratisation of Brahminical institutions. The Sufi missionaries seemed to have had great influence among the rather ill-defined group, the *Jogis*. The *Jogis*, particularly the Gorakhnath-panthis, popularised the concept of the *Sadguru*, which mingled with the *Sant* movement.[9] The interaction of Sufi doctrines with Brahminism led to the evolution of a simple and more emotional type of *bhakti* (devotion) that was directed either towards Krishna or Rama. It also gave rise to a movement that could break away from traditional orthodox Hinduism without surrendering its Hindu identity.

Dr Badri Narayan Srivastava observes that, by AD 1100, Krishna *bhakti* had received general acceptance in several parts of India, but the tradition of Rama *bhakti* may be observed only in some parts of North India. He emphasises that *Rama bhakti* seems to have grown only after the emergence of Swami Ramananda in Benares.[10] Dr Srivastava adds further that, before Ramananda, the Ramanuja sect was extremely popular in North India and, at that time, Lakshminarayan was the chief deity. It was during the life-time of Swami Ramananda that the other incarnations of Vishnu became popular. These included Rama, Krishna, Narasingh and others. However, no fixed rules and rituals had yet evolved for the worship of these deities which were incarnations of Vishnu. It may also be added that during this time, *Shaivism* started declining in significance and influence in North India.

The late growth of the tradition of Rama *bhakti* is supported by the late evolution of Ayodhya as an important centre of Hindu pilgrimage. W.C. Benet, who compiled the first Gazetteer of the Province of Avadh, remarked in 1877:

> *Hindu revival in Ayodhya is one of the most remarkable things in modern times. In Buddhist times the place had no peculiar sanctity, although there were doubtless temples and shrines. Long afterwards, during many centuries, Gaya, Benares, Puri and Mathura kept their reputation, while Ayodhya became a wilderness and a famous hunting ground.*[11]

The importance of Ayodhya as a place of pilgrimage for Hindus rose during the seventeenth century, when it came to be considered one of the more important religious places in North India.

The several treatises compiled on *Tirtha Yatras* (pilgrimages) lend support to the view that Ayodhya developed late as a place of Hindu pilgrimage. The *Vividha-tirthakalpa*, a Jain text compiled in the eighth century mentions Ayodhya as the place where the Jain *tirthankars* lived. Although it also refers to Ayodhya as the birth-place of Rama, it does not single it out as an important place of worship for the Brahmins.[12]

The first attempt to re-state the theory of pilgrimage was made by Lakshmidhara. He indicated the benefits of visiting the *tirthas*, and compiled a book *Tirtha-vivechana-kanda* on the various

religious places mentioned in the Hindu epics and Pauranic literature. This was the eighth volume of Lakshmidhara's great digest *Kritya-kalpataru* written *circa* 1125.[13] In the *Dharamashastra-Nibandha* he emphasised the place of pilgrimage in the recognised scheme of a Hindu's life.[14] In the *Tirtha-kalpataru*, every practice supposedly grounded on Pauranic or Smriti authority was justified. The most important places of pilgrimage listed by him include Kashi, Prayag, the River Ganga, and Gaya. Although Ayodhya has been mentioned as one of the several secondary places of worship, it has not been associated with Rama. Goprataru, a place associated with Vishnu, is marked out as the sacred place in Ayodhya.

In fact, Lakshmidhara is extremely reluctant to accept that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu. In *Brahmachari-kanda*, the first volume of the *Kritya-kalpataru*, he illustrates the distinction between *dharma* and *adharma* with the killing of Vali by Rama.[15] He says Vali, who had abducted the wife of his younger brother who should have been like a daughter to him, committed an act of *adharma*. On the other hand, Rama committed an act of *dharma* by killing Vali. He justifies Rama's action on the ground that he was the viceroy of Bharat, the ruler of the domain, and therefore had the right to punish wrongdoers. He also argues that any criticism of Rama's action would have been completely null had the justification been used that Rama was the incarnation of Vishnu, the ruler of the universe. It seems that Lakshmidhara himself was not convinced of the reincarnation theory and therefore refrained from using that particular justification.

In the treatise *Tirtha-chintamani* compiled by Vachaspati Mishra in 1420, the chief places of Hindu pilgrimages mentioned by him included Gaya, Purshottama (Puri), Prayag, Kashi and the river Ganga.[16] Vachaspati Mishra also referred to the *Adhyatma Ramayana* and pointed out that bathing in the river Saryu washed away one's sins. He added that after having a bath in the river, a pilgrim must worship Lord Vishnu at the Goprataru (Guptar Ghat) in Ayodhya. However, he does not refer to Ayodhya as a *punyasthan* for its association with Shri Rama.

It is extremely surprising that a religious treatise almost contemporaneous with Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* does not refer

either to Rama or Ayodhya. Todar Mal, a noble in the court of Emperor Akbar, was a regular visitor to the city of Kashi. He commissioned a number of Pandits of Benares to compile an encyclopaedic religious treatise, which came to be called the *Todar-nandam*.[17] Apparently completed in 1585, the *Todar-nandam* refers to neither Rama nor Ayodhya. Todar Mal is said to have met Tulsidas in Kashi and also to having had the Kashi Viswanath temple repaired, but he refrains from giving us any impressions of Ayodhya.

It was in the seventeenth century that Ayodhya began to be mentioned in the treatises on *tirthasthans* as a place of pilgrimage for Hindus. Mitra-Mishra in the *Tirtha-prakasa* (Volume X of the *Viramitrodaya* compiled in 1620) mentions Ayodhya as an important place of pilgrimage.[18] Mitra-Mishra gives a detailed list of all the *tirthasthans* of India. He calls the river Saryu a *punya-nadi* (holy river). Some of the very important places of worship in his order of significance are: Kashi, Prayag, Ganga-Sagar-Sangam, Ganga-Saryu-Sangam, Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Gaya, Kurukshetra, Prabhas, Pushkar, Lokagral, Kedar, Salagyagram (Nepal), Ayodhya, Mathura, Ujjaini, Dwaraka, Tapi, Godavari, Kishikandhitti, Shahmalak, Gokaran, Purshottam, Konarak-Kamrup. We may note that, although Mitra-Mishra included Ayodhya as a significant place of worship, he does not name it as the most important centre of pilgrimage in North India.

Although the notion that Rama was the *avatar* of Vishnu was as old as the *Ramayana*, it did not receive general acceptance till the rise of the *Sants*.

The Guptas were devotees of Vishnu. Kumaragupta adopted the symbols associated with Vishnu in his court. His successor, Skandagupta, who ruled between AD 455 and 467 is said to have shifted his capital from Pataliputra to Saketa (Ayodhya). It is believed that he liked to compare himself to Rama and this was the motive behind the choice of a shift in the capital.[19]

The deification of Rama started gaining acceptance in the thirteenth century. The importance of the festival of Rama's birth (*Ramnavami*) was duly recognised by Hemadri who wrote his standard book on Hindu *dharma* between 1260 and 1270. In the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the story of Rama

came to be retold in the vernacular languages, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, Assamese, Bengali and Oriya. In central India, the compilation of the *Mahatmyas* started and a new corpus of literature featuring the story of Rama emerged in the fifteenth century. It was during this time that the rituals and traditions of Rama *bhakti* were elaborated along orthodox Vedantic lines in the *Adhyatma-ramayana*.[20]

In the fifteenth century, Vaishnavism and the *Sant* tradition tended to merge with each other. This is exemplified by the *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas. For Tulsidas, the main *sadhana* consisted of singing the name of Rama and recounting his deeds (*smarana*) in the company of saints. By this time Rama had become the most popular form of Vishnu and devotion to Rama, expressed through the repetition of his name or through *puja* in a temple, had become one of the principal elements of Vaishnavism. Works written in the vernacular languages promulgated this form of devotion among all classes of Hindus. Indeed, it was the *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas that successfully completed the deification of Rama, the hero-king of Ayodhya.

After the sixteenth century, the story of Rama became so popular that it wove its way inextricably into the fabric of rural culture and religion. Rama came to be revered and worshipped as the ideal man, hero-king, and an *avatar* of Vishnu. The growing popularity of Rama forced Brahminism to accept him as an *avatar* and, soon, several places, rivers, lakes and wells came to be considered sacred by virtue of their deemed association with Rama, Sita and Lakshman. The annual fair commemorating the birth of Rama started being held in Ayodhya and soon attracted huge crowds of people. It became the largest gathering in Avadh. It was estimated that, on one occasion in the nineteenth century, the annual fair had had a gathering of more than 500,000 (five lakh or half a million) people.[21]

Hindus belonging to different sects congregated at Ayodhya to celebrate many events in the life of Rama. The Shaivas (who are opposed to the hegemony of Vishnu as the chief God) also joined in the celebration of the festivals of Rama. In Ayodhya, the Shaivas were equal in number to the Vaishnavas.

Population of Ayodhya in 1877[22]

Total Population		7,518
Muslims:	Shias	1,603
	Sunnis	889
Hindus:	Shaivas	2,075
	Vaishnavas	2,222
	Nanakshahis	100
	Aghori	10
	Other Sects	592

In the eighteenth century, several incidents from the life of Rama came to be celebrated as festivals. Large fairs were held to commemorate such occasions. Benet gives us a list of fairs held in Ayodhya in 1877. These included *Ramnavami* (the birth of Rama), *Jhula* (in the month of Shravan in the rainy season), and *Kartik Purnima* (the November full-moon).[23] The *Ramlila* was enacted and large numbers of people congregated to witness the story of the life of Rama.

It is clear that Hindu revisionism had in some ways succeeded in containing the expanding influence of the Sufis. The revivalist movement found a congenial environment for growth in Avadh because of the new political circumstances that started taking shape in the late eighteenth century. The Nawabs of Avadh were Shias and were anxious to shake off the domination of the Sunni Mughal Emperors, after the Battle of Buxar in 1765 had proved the growing power of the East India Company. Shuja-ud-daulah, the Nawab of Avadh, accepted the superior strength of the British and concluded a treaty with them in 1765. Soon thereafter, the Mewati soldiers of the Mughal Emperor were removed from Faizabad and Ayodhya and the Shia Muslim aristocracy started rising in importance.[24] In order to retain their positions, a large number of Sunni Muslim nobles became Shias. It was no coincidence that, during this period, several Hindu monastic orders started settling and expanding in Ayodhya. In 1861 there were seven *akharas* (cloisters) belonging to different monastic orders or *Bairagis* (worshippers of Vishnu) in Ayodhya.[25] The *akharas* were presided over by a Mahant. These included, the *Nirbani* ('the silent') who lived in Hanuman Garhi; the *Nirmohi* ('the detached')

who had their establishments at Ram Ghat and Guptar Ghat; the *Digambari* ('the sky-clad'), the naked sect of ascetics; the *Khakhi* or the ash-besmeared sect; the *Mahanirbani* or 'dumb' sect who literally did not speak; the *Santokhi* ('the patient ones'); and the *Nirlambhis* or 'the improvident ones'. These various sects apparently settled in Ayodhya during the reign of Shuja-ud-daulah. They received liberal land grants for their maintenance from Nawabs Shuja-ud-daulah and Asaf-ud-daulah. They also received grants, donations and favours from court officials and revenue-farmers.[26] Soon these religious sects became powerful by virtue of their control over land and by money-lending. In 1900, the *Faqirs*, *Goshains* and *Bairagis* together held forty-seven estates in the district of Faizabad.[27] In the same year, the *Nirbanis* were considered the most wealthy of the sects in Ayodhya. They held revenue-free land in the districts of Faizabad, Gonda, Basti, Pratapgarh, and Shahjahanpur. They carried on an extensive business as money-lenders and dealers in elephants. The Mahants of these *akharas* had also purchased several villages from their personal income.[28]

Thus, Hindu revivalism apparently took root in Avadh during the reign of the Nawabs, and started consolidating its position soon after the take-over of Ayodhya by the British. It was during this time that Leyden made popular the idea that Babur had visited Ayodhya in 1528. It was also at this time that the *Nirmohis* who had their establishment at Ram Ghat and Guptar Ghat raised their claims over the Babri Masjid. They contended that the Babri Masjid stood on the spot of the Ramjanambhoomi temple destroyed by the Mughal emperor, Babur. These doubtful claims led to the bloody conflict of 1853–55.

About this time, the local Muslims, particularly the Sunnis, laid their claims to a Hindu temple. The belief spread that the Hanuman Garhi temple had been raised over the ruins of a mosque. The story has all the ingredients of a local myth. It was said that a mosque had been constructed in Ayodhya by a Mughal emperor at the place where the Hanuman Garhi stood. It was added that a Hindu *sanyasi* began living under a tree in front of the mosque. He received food and alms from the people who came to pray in the mosque. Soon, the *sanyasi* built himself a small hut and had a flag hoisted atop it. After a long time, he acquired wooden doors and,

when asked, he said he had been asked by the Imam to get them for the *masjid*, which was without doors. Gradually, the *sanyasi* was successful in taking over the mosque and proclaiming it a temple.[29]

This was a highly improbable story because it would have been difficult to replace a mosque without the local people objecting. The Muslim claims gained support and, in 1855, the local Muslims decided to offer *namaz* at the Hanuman Garhi temple. The Hindus naturally objected and decided to ward off the Muslims. They congregated under the leadership of Raja Man Singh of the Mehdaura estate and successfully contained the Muslim force, eventually chasing them into the Babri Masjid. News of the clash reached Lucknow and the Nawab ordered an enquiry. In the meantime, the Nawab sent out troops to protect the Hanuman Garhi from further attacks. The local people were asked to provide evidence to support the claim that the Hanuman Garhi had been raised on the ruins of a mosque. None being brought forward, the Nawab decided to provide protection to the temple.[30] However, with regard to the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy, the local committee decided to raise a platform outside the Babri Masjid, which would commemorate the birthplace of Rama.

The uprisings of 1857 made the British re-affirm their support for the Hindu revivalist movement in Faizabad-Ayodhya. In May 1857, the news of the uprising was confirmed and the British officials stationed in Faizabad started preparing themselves to face the rebels. They immediately started organising their defence by collecting stores and fortifying the house of Captain Thurburn, the Assistant Commissioner of Faizabad. The British expected the zamindars and company pensioners to be loyal. This belief was encouraged by the offers of asylum given by Raja Man Singh of Ayodhya, Thakurain Raghunath Kanwar, Mir Baqar Hussain, and Nadir Shah. A similar offer was also made by the *Mahants* of the Hanuman Garhi. When the uprising broke out in Faizabad, the landlords adopted a kind of neutrality. However, the Mahants provided shelter to the British officers and their families and helped them to escape. After the suppression of the uprising, all those who had supported the British were rewarded according to the nature and extent of their help. Raja Man Singh added a few

more villages to his estate and emerged as the most powerful taluqadar of Faizabad.[31] The *Mahants* of Hanuman Garhi were also rewarded for their services. They received a few rent-free grants of land and were probably also encouraged to raise claims over the Babri Masjid.

In 1859, the British declared that the communal situation in Faizabad-Ayodhya was extremely critical. They expressed the fear that the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi issue could at any time lead to a bloody conflict. They declared that a physical separation of the two places of worship had to be made immediately. An iron grille was put up to separate the platform from the mosque. The *Mahants* now had the whole eastern front of the Babri mosque to themselves. The colonial government chose to remain silent on the occupation of land by the Hindu *Mahants* on the eastern front of the Babri Masjid. Legally, it could have raised objections because all the land in Ayodhya had been declared *nazul* land.[32] Instead, it deliberately allowed the *Mahants* to extend their activities around the Babri Masjid.

In these circumstances, Hindu revivalism flourished, inevitably giving rise to Hindu fundamentalism. In the nineteenth century, some Hindu fundamentalists propagated the idea that Ayodhya represented the forehead of Vishnu. By this time Ayodhya had become an important seat of learning as well as the most important of the seven *tirthas* (holy places). It had evolved as the undoubtedly most important centre of Vishnu worship in Avadh, if not in the whole of upper India. It soon came to claim precedence over Mathura and Hardwar. A large number of temples sprang up in Ayodhya. Most of them were raised at spots said to mark different incidents in the life of Rama. In 1902, an attempt was made to identify such major temples. A local committee was formed under the chairmanship of Mahant Ram Manohar Pershad of the Bara Asthan (the palace of king Dasharatha) with the object of commemorating the coronation of King Edward VII. The local committee collected Rs 1,000 and decided to spend the amount on the erection of stone pillars to mark the sacred places in Ayodhya.[33] This committee selected 145 sacred places in Ayodhya. It started its task by putting up the first stone-mark at the eastern entrance of the Babri Masjid. The mark read 'Shri Ramjanambhoomi'. It

was surprising that the local committee which had the Deputy Collector as one of the members chose to remain silent on the writing on the stone-mark. He could, in all fairness, have asked that the mark should read No. 1—Ramjanambhoomi/Babri Masjid. We could conclude: (*a*) The Deputy Collector was simply not concerned about the stone-marks being put up by the local committee; (*b*) neither he nor the other members of the committee considered the Babri Masjid a religious place; and (*c*) the Deputy Collector was interested in strengthening the Hindu claim on the spot of the Babri Masjid. The intentions of the local committee are all the more doubtful because it chose to mark out a total of 145 places of worship in Ayodhya. It was claimed by the members of the committee that in this they had followed the *Ayodhya Mahatmya*.[34] Yet the committee put up pillars at fourteen other places that had not been marked by the *Mahatmya*.

In the twentieth century, the nature of the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi controversy was determined largely by the evolution and development of the political situation in North India. The Hindu fundamentalists raised several issues to further popularise Hinduism. They began the campaign for taking back into the Hindu fold those who had been converted to Islam. The *Shuddhi* (purification) movement was accompanied by the campaign to protect the cow. In Bihar and eastern United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh), *Gaurakshini Sabhas* (Cow Protection Societies) were organised. The campaign to protect cows, particularly from sacrifice during the *Idd-uz-zuha* festival of the Muslims, had had some success in the 1880s and 1890s. A large number of Muslims agreed to sacrifice lambs instead of cows. In Bihar and eastern U.P., the campaign to protect the cow re-emerged and gained force after 1910. In 1912 and 1913, violence rocked Ayodhya on the issue of cow slaughter. This resulted in major Hindu–Muslim conflicts in and around Ayodhya.

The General Elections of 1926 in the United Provinces further extended and intensified the Hindu–Muslim divide. The personal rivalry between Motilal Nehru and Madan Mohan Malviya was projected as a Hindu–Muslim question. Madan Mohan Malviya questioned Motilal Nehru about his attitude towards the Hindus. The defence provided by Motilal Nehru unnecessarily projected

him as the protector of the Muslims. The communal question had come to dominate politics in India by this time. This is not to contend that the Hindu–Muslim question had not been raised before 1926; in 1918, Madan Mohan Malviya had gone to the extent of expressing to the then Lieutenant-Governor of the U.P., Harcourt Butler, his fear that a take-over of North India by the Muslims, particularly by the Afghans, was imminent.[35]

Communal issues divided the landlords of the United Provinces. They had been a powerful group since 1858. Loyal to the government, they united at times only to pressurise the Government whenever it proposed to curtail their rights in land. However, since the election of 1920 because of their larger representation in the Legislative Council, the landlords had their representatives appointed to the post of ministers. Generally, the two ministers were chosen from the two major religious communities. In 1926, a minister, the Nawab of Chhatari, had been shifted to the Centre, therefore the question of replacement arose. It was on this issue that the Hindu and Muslim landholders came to form distinct groups.[36] This rivalry continued to intensify.

Ayodhya and Faizabad were also affected by the new developments. Minor tensions arose at different times. It was on 17 April 1934 that the situation grew serious. On that day Muslims were to celebrate *Idd-uz-zuha*. The local Muslims decided to sacrifice a cow on the day and applied for permission. According to the rules, cow sacrifice could only be undertaken if the Chairman of the local Municipal Board and the District Magistrate permitted it. Permission was granted but the local Hindus had already declared that they would not allow the sacrifice. They had been convinced that Babu Dhani Ram, Chairman of the Municipal Board, would deny permission. However, he had seen no reason to do so. Major disturbance arose after the cow was slaughtered. The *Bairagis* were probably prepared for this and immediately took over the Babri Masjid. It is also presumed that the Rani of Amansa and the Raja of Alwar, who were staying in Ayodhya, actively helped the rioters. In about two hours, the domes of the mosque were completely destroyed. The police arrived in time to save the mosque from further destruction. The local administration blamed the Hindus for the riots and imposed a fine on them. The local

Hindus collected Rs 125,000 and this was used for the repair of the domes and other damage to the mosque. This incident in no way reduced tension.

In December 1949, all the accumulated tension and resentment focused on the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi.

Notes and References

1. D.D. Butter, *Outline of Topography and Statistics of the Southern Districts of Oudh and the Cantonment of Sultanpur, Oudh*, Calcutta, 1839, p. 11.
2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. See Irwin, op. cit.
4. Benet, op. cit., Vol. I, p. *xxvii*.
5. W.W. Hoey, trans., op. cit., p. 36.
6. Several *mazaars* or tombs in Avadh were considered sacred by the local population and attracted a large number of people seeking the blessings of the saints, irrespective of their religious background. See the accounts of the *mazaars* in Irwin, op. cit., p. 57, and Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 46.
7. The religious sects associated with Rama generally trace their origin from Swami Ramananda. The Ramanandi sects became prominent at the close of the seventeenth century. They received official recognition in the first quarter of the eighteenth century at a conference held near Jaipur under the auspices of Raja Jai Singh of Jaipur (1698–1743). The *akhara* of the Ramanandi sect was founded in Ayodhya by Govindadas, who belonged to the Nirmohi *akhara*, at the Ramatirtha (Ramghat) when he arrived from Jaipur after attending the conference. This coincided with the establishment of the Nirvani *akhara* on the Hanumantila by Abhayram. Richard Burghart says, 'There were at the turn of the 18th century about ten generations of Hindu ascetics who claimed spiritual descent from Ramananda.' (1978, p. 130.) The oldest foundation of this branch of Vaishnavism in Ayodhya is the *Bara Asthan* founded in the second quarter of the eighteenth century by Swami Ramaprasada.
8. See Carnegy, op. cit., Appendixes I–XI.
9. See Vandeville, 1974, pp. 94, 106, 134.
10. Badri Narayan Srivastava, *Ramananda sampradaya tatha Hindi sampradaya par uska prabhav*, Allahabad, 1957, p. 151.
11. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 9.
12. See the *Vividha-tirthakalpa* of Jainprabha Suri, Singhi Jain Series, Santiniketan, 1934.
13. Lakshmidhara Bhatta, *Tirtha-vivechana-kanda*, Vol. VIII of *Krityakalpataru*, Baroda Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1942.
14. Lakshmidhara Bhatta, *Dharamashastra-nibandha*, Vol. II of *Krityakalpataru*, Baroda Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1942.
15. Lakshmidhara Bhatta, *Brahmachari-kanda*, Vol. I of *Krityakalpataru*, Baroda Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1942.

16. Vachaspati Misra, *Tirthachintamani*, ed. Satya Vrat Tripathi, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1912.
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18. Mitra Misra, ed., *Tirtha-prakasa*, Vol. X of Pt. Vishnu Prasad Mahamahopadyaya, *Viramitrodaya*, Benares, 1917.
19. R.C. Majumdar, *A History of India*, Calcutta, p. 151.
20. Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, Holland, 1987, p. 30.
21. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 455.
22. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 13.
23. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 453.
24. See W.W. Hoey, trans., op. cit.
25. Carnegy, op. cit., and Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 5–7.
26. See Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 5–7. Also see Nevill's *Fyzabad Gazetteer*, pp. 140–60.
27. See Nevill's *Fyzabad Gazetteer*, p. 178.
28. Ibid., pp. 62–63.
29. See *Tawarikh-i-Avadh*, op. cit.
30. Ibid.
31. Nevill's *Fyzabad Gazetteer*, p. 163.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. See Papers of Sir Harcourt Butler: Correspondence of Butler with his mother, 1819 (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi).
36. See Sushil Srivastava, 'Landlord-Tenant Relationship in Avadh, 1920–1939,' unpublished thesis, Allahabad University, 1987.

Chapter Four

Ayodhya: A Historical Sketch

A historical study of Ayodhya in the ancient period is difficult because of the scanty and doubtful evidence available. There are long gaps which cannot be substantiated by archaeological, epigraphic or literary data. We have some evidence, but it provides only the most cursory insight into the past. Where there is archaeological or epigraphic evidence, it is not supported by literary sources. Before the twelfth century, we have to relate the developments in Ayodhya with the general history of North India. After 1100, we begin to have literary sources in the form of general histories (*twarikh*), accounts of travellers, letters, and epigraphic evidence to give us an account of the happenings in Ayodhya. The general lack of historical accounts and other evidences during the ancient period can be attributed to the lack of a Hindu tradition of historical writing. The tradition was of writing eulogies on the rulers. The practice of recording events in a systematic form seems to have been brought to India by the Muslims. As such, we begin to have a more detailed account of Ayodhya after *c.* AD 1100.

The general confusion and the disagreement among scholars has arisen on the issue of the geographical location of the Ayodhya of mythology. Some contend that the 'Ayodhya' of Valmiki's *Ramayana* is situated on the right bank of the river Ghagra, latitude 26°–47′ North and longitude 82°–15′ East.

However, popular opinion has come to identify modern Ayodhya with the Ayodhya of the *Ramayana*. There are several scholars who believe that the city of Saketa which was often mentioned in ancient literary sources including the Buddhist writings can be identified with Ayodhya. The Jaina texts often mention a city

variously called Visakha, Viniya or Vinita, which has also been identified with modern Ayodhya. For the Jainas, Ayodhya was an important place because it was visited by Mahavira, and four *tirthankaras* are said to have been born there. Therefore, if we believe these sources to be reliable, we can safely state that over the ages Ayodhya has been called, variously, Saketa, Vinita or Visakha, Kosala or Maha Kosala, Ikshvakubhoomi, Rampuri and Ramjanambhoomi.

The attempt to locate the geographical position of Ayodhya was made by archaeological excavations. To date, four archaeological surveys have been carried out in the area that is today demarcated as Ayodhya. The first archaeological survey was conducted in 1862–63 by A. Cunningham. The second was completed by A. Fuhrer in 1889–1891. The third and the fourth archaeological excavations are recent. In 1969–70, Professor A.K. Narayan of the Banaras Hindu University dug three sites in Ayodhya and, in 1975–76, Professor B.B. Lal conducted an extensive survey in the area.

Cunningham and, after him, Fuhrer were convinced that the present-day Ayodhya was the same as the Ayodhya of the *Ramayana*. Cunningham's intention in conducting the survey was to relocate Buddhist historical sites. He concluded that the cities of Visakha and Saketa were identical with Ayodhya. He observes:

> *The identity of Saketa and Ayodhya has, I believe, always been admitted; but I am not aware that any proof has yet been offered to establish the fact ... . But the question would appear to be set at rest by several passages of the Ramayana and Raghuvamsha, in which Saketnagara is distinctly called the capital of Raja Dasaratha and his sons.*[1]

Cunningham further observes:

> *The ancient city of Ayodhya or Saketa is described in the Ramayana as situated on the bank of the Sarayu or Sarju River. It is said to have been 12 yojans, or nearly 100 miles in circumference, for which we should read 12 kos, or 24 miles—an extent which the old city, with all its gardens, might once have probably covered. The distance from the Guptar Ghat on the west, to the Ram Ghat on the east, is just 6 miles*

on a direct line, and if we suppose that the city with its suburbs and gardens formerly occupied the whole intervening space to a depth of two miles, its circuit would have agreed with the smaller measurement of 12 kos.[2]

However, Cunningham failed to find the remains of ancient Hindu temples in Ayodhya, though he did find remnants of Buddhist structures. He took the cue from the two Chinese travellers who are said to have come to Ayodhya in the fifth and seventh century AD respectively. He was convinced by their descriptions that remains of the Buddhist period could be found in the mounds.[3] After him, Fuhrer agreed with Cunningham's conclusions. He could be accused of having conducted a light survey and, consequently, repeating whatever Cunningham had held in 1862–1863.[4]

The excavations conducted by Narayan and Lal were more scientific and accurate than the previous ones. Professor Narayan's digs in 1969–1970 were limited to three vertical cuttings—one near the Lakshman Ghat, the second at Lakshman Tekri and the third at Nal-tila. These excavations revealed two conditions of strata at the first two sites followed by a third layer after the clearing of the sites. The cutting near the Nal-tila brought to light only the earliest layer which was marked by the presence of Northern Black Polished Ware, coarse grey ware and the associated red wares.[5] He was therefore convinced that the dug-up area indicated habitation as old as the fifth century BC. He was also convinced that there was a strong Buddhist presence in the area under study.

The last excavation conducted by Professor B.B. Lal was intensive and extremely revealing. He concluded, on the basis of his findings, that the first occupation of the Ramkot area can be ascribed to circa the seventh century BC. A few shreds of grey ware pertaining to a very late and degenerate phase of the well-known Painted Grey Ware were found in all its shades.[6] Lal also conducted digs in the Babri Masjid area; 'in the Janam Bhumi area a massive wall of bricks was observed across the sector obliquely.' Lal tentatively identified this wall with a fortification which might possibly date from before the third century BC. He writes, 'The fortification wall appears to have had a fairly deep ditch, almost like a moat, just on its exterior, which was partly cut into the natural clay overlying the

fluviatile sand bed."[7] This revealed that the site had developed into an urban centre at the end of the sixth or first half of the fifth century BC, which coincided with the emergence of many towns on the Ganga basin, for which there is also evidence in literary sources.

Professor B.B. Lal is convinced that the Ayodhya of today is the same as the Ayodhya of the epic literature. He writes:

> *as the results of the excavations indicate, the beginning of habitation in Ayodhya can be dated as early as the seventh century* BC. *As such the excavated sites associated with Mahabharata, like Hastinapur etc., antedate Ayodhya ... . This appears to be the main reason for some scholars to think that the ancient site on the bank of the Saraju, known as Ayodhya, may not be Ayodhya of the Valmiki Ramayana ... .*[8]

M.C. Joshi had raised the objection but Lal contradicted him and successfully established that modern Ayodhya was the same as the epic city.

Despite his brilliant defence of his theory, Lal's contention can be weakened by a close study of the *Ramayana*. In the older parts of the *Ramayana* (Books II–VI), it is actually suggested that Rama's capital was situated in the vicinity of the Saryu. It is suggested therein that the Saryu river was at some distance away from the city, since the funeral procession of Dasharatha makes use of palanquins and chariots to arrive at its banks. Moreover, apart from the vagueness about the location of Ayodhya in the earlier parts of the book, it may be observed that the location of the Saryu river is hardly more exact. The Saryu known from the Vedic literature was most likely a river somewhere in the Punjab.[9] Thus, it appears that the doubt regarding the exact location of the epic city of Ayodhya continues. For the sake of convenience, we might concede that there is great support for the identification of modern Ayodhya with the Ayodhya of Valmiki's *Ramayana*.

There is also controversy regarding the location of the historical kingdom of Kosala and the city of Saketa. The region around today's Ayodhya is generally identified with the *janapada* or territory of the Kosalas. The *janapada* of the Kosalas was transformed into a kingdom of Kosala in the early historical period. In the days of the Buddha and Mahavira (the second half of the sixth

century and the beginning of fifth century BC) the kingdom of Kosala is said to have contained the two important cities of Sravasti and Saketa. According to the Buddhist Pali canon, Sravasti ('Savatthi') was the capital and residence of the king, whereas the Jaina canon mentions Saketa ('Saeya') as the capital of Kosala. Modern historians, from Cunningham onwards, are unanimous that Sravasti, which is identified with the site known as Saheth-Maheth, 80 kilometres north of Ayodhya, was the older capital of Kosala. Although, topographically, there is unanimity that the said cities can be identified with modern Ayodhya, literary sources seem to differ.

Rhys David, who depended on Buddhist sources, does not agree that 'Saketa' and 'Ayojjha' are the same.[10] However, Cunningham,[11], Kane[12] and B.C. Law[13] agree that the two cities are virtually identical. In some of the sources in which Ayojjha figures, the place is said to be situated on the bank of the river Ganga. If Ayodhya indeed made up about a quarter of the town of Saketa, it is surprising that this name does not figure more often in Buddhist or Jaina descriptions of the city. It is amazing when we realise that places where the Buddha lived are frequently mentioned, such as Anjana, Tikandaki and Kalakarma, but never Ayojjha. Again, we do not have any epic literature which refers exclusively to that quarter of the town, i.e., Ayojjha, and never to the town Saketa.[14] Bareau therefore draws the conclusion on the basis of the Pali canon that Saketa and Ayojjha refer to two different sites.[15]

A similar situation is demonstrated by the older parts of the Jaina canon. In most of the *angas* and *upangas*, Saeya (Sageya) figures prominently, having been visited by Mahavira, whereas Ayojjha is only mentioned once, when it is said to be the capital of the north-west district of Gandhilvatti, of the largely mythologic... country of Mahavidesha. The Ayojjha of the Pali canon is virtuall... absent in the early portions of the Jaina canon.

The aforesaid confusion leads to a related controversy—whether the Saketa of both heterodox canons is identical with the Ayodhya of epic Sanskrit literature. Hans Bakker raises the issue that

> *if one takes both names as toponyms of the site AY (Ayodhya) as is mostly done, an explanation should be given as to why the epic sources*

> *make absolutely no mention of the other name Saketa, while vice-versa the canonical literature never refers to the site AY as Ayodhya. If, on the other hand, one considers both towns to be different, one must explain how Saketa, evidently one of the most important cities of early historical India, could be totally ignored in epic Sanskrit literature. A simple answer to this effect that Saketa was of no relevance to the Brahminical (Hindu) fold of Indian society seems to be contradicted by its acknowledged historical importance, to say nothing of the difficulty of finding another location of Ayodhya. Those who adhere to the theory that identifies the epic Ayodhya with the canonical Saketa may explain the discrepancies between these two by consigning them to two different historical eras. Ayodhya is the name of the town in its earliest phase, Saketa refers to the town during the period of Buddha and thereafter.*[16]

To this we may add the opinion of Sankalia:

> *It would be borne in mind however, that towns did exist in the Ganges basin before the sixth century* BC. *The epic literature is evidently concerned with a city which may reflect the period in which it was composed rather than the pre-historical period.*[17]

We may consider the nature of the texts in which Ayodhya and Saketa occur, and differentiate them according to their historical periods. Ayodhya only figures in literature that is predominantly legendary in character. As such, the historicity of this town may be questioned. To settle this issue we should first concentrate on the early historical period up to circa the second century AD, when the existence of Ayodhya is not attested by any archaeological or epigraphical evidence.

In the *Mahabharata* and *Puranapanchalakshana*, the town of Ayodhya is only known as the capital of the kings of the Ikshvaku line, including Rama, son of Dasharatha. Although Ayodhya is sometimes identified with the country of Kosala, in which the capital of King Rituparna is also called Kosala, it is nowhere said to be situated on the banks of the Saryu. A similar confusion arises in the earlier books of the *Ramayana*, where the location of Ayodhya and the river Saryu raise doubts. Again, the legend of Rama does not seem to be wholly connected with the city of

Ayodhya, as is apparent from the Buddhist *Dasharathajataka* in which the capital of Dasharatha and Rama is said to be Benares. Also, the Ikshvaku race does not seem to have been always connected with Ayodhya. While the name Ikshvaku is known from the *Rigveda*, the city of Ayodhya is not. The *Sankhyanasrautasutra* knows the legend of the Aikeshvaka king, Harishchandra, but his residence is only called 'a village' (*grama*). Ayodhya is not mentioned by name as is wrongly suggested by Law.[18] Despite these several discrepancies, we may associate Rama with Ayodhya because of his believed descent from Ikshvaku, whose association with Ayodhya is certain.

The second controversy arises over the identification of Saketa with Ayodhya. The town Saketa was associated with the Ikshvaku dynasty for the first time, though we do not have any source which suggests that a *Kshatriya* lineage which claimed descent from the solar dynasty ruled in Ayodhya or its environs before the second millenium. (The legendary king, Ikshvaku, is mentioned in the *Smritis* and the *Ramayana*. Rama is said to have been of his line.) There are no contemporary texts that identify Ayodhya with Saketa. Both city names are conspicuously absent in the *Tirthayatraparvan*. Also, there is no epigraphical or archaeological evidence to show the existence of a town of Ayodhya.

It was after AD 1000 that the identification of Rama with Vishnu and the legends about Ikshvaku's dynasty grew in strength. Jainism absorbed the mythology of the Ikshvaku line and, so, the first *tirthankara*, Rishabha, was said to have been born in Ikkhagabhumi or Viniya (Vinita), as it is called in the *Jainbudvipaprajnapti*. The mythological city of Viniya was later identified with the epic city, Ayodhya. Since Saketa was already one of the holy places of Jainism, hallowed by the visits of Mahavira, the Jainas did not hesitate to amalgamate Viniya, Ikkhagabhumi, Ayojjha and Saketa. Hans Bakker concludes that this phenomenon coincided with the time 'when Rama lore was incorporated into Jaina mythology, i.e., the early centuries of the Christian era, and it first found expression in the *Paumchariya* (not later than 4th century AD).[19] Bakker claims that the reification led to the general identification of Ayodhya and Saketa, the process being completed in the age of the Guptas. However, he holds that the identification had not yet

gained acceptance during the rule of the early Guptas, because some Purana texts hold the Guptas sovereign over the real Saketa rather than the marvellous Ayodhya.[20]

During this period, the identification of Saketa with Ayodhya is attested by both Jaina and Sanskrit texts. The *Brahmandapurana* and Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha* are two examples. It is only now that the name Ayodhya begins to denote an existing township. Testimony is found in the inscriptions of the later Guptas, i.e., after the fifth century AD. An inscription of AD 436 describes the donees of a gift as 'Brahmins hailing from Ayodhya'. A Gupta inscription of AD 533/34 mentions a nobleman from Ayodhya.[21]

The acceptance of the reification is supported by the move to shift the royal court of the Guptas from Pataliputra to Saketa or to a newly established quarter by its side, henceforth known as Ayodhya, during the reign of either Kumaragupta I or Skandagupta (AD 415–467). This event is hailed by Kalidasa in *Raghuvamsha*, where he attempts to identify Saketa with Ayodhya. Soon after the fifth century AD the texts begin to refer to Ayodhya and Saketa as the same place.[22]

Towards the close of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth centuries BC, Saketa was a flourishing town in the kingdom of Kosala, ruled by King Prasenjit whose residence was in Sravasti, 80 km. to the north. The town probably emerged as an important commercial centre because of its geographical position. It was situated at the junction of two important highways: The north-south route leading from Sravasti in the north to Pratishthana (in present-day Maharashtra) in the south, and the east-west connection leading from Rajagriha through Varanasi to Sravasti and thence to Taxila in the west. These two highways met at Saketa. As it was a busy place where a large number of people flocked together, it was attractive for such preachers as the Buddha and Mahavira. Religious gatherings were held in its parks. Several such gardens have been mentioned in Buddhist and Jaina texts. It was said that when the owner of a garden was converted by one of these preachers or his disciples, the garden would be donated to that particular order. This led to the foundation of religious buildings such as the *vihara* or *stupa*.

The wall excavated by B.B. Lal indicates the fortification of the

town at an early date. The kingdom of Kosala was at war with its neighbours, especially Kasi. The latter might have been conquered and temporarily incorporated into the kingdom of Kosala during the reign of Prasenjit. This is suggested by the frequent occurrence of the name 'Kasi-Kosala.' The Kosala kingdom was increasingly threatened by the rise of Magadhan power, although Prasenjit and Bimbisara (*c.* 544–493 BC) are said to have lived in peace, being connected by matrimonial alliance. During this time, Kasi was briefly a buffer between the rising power of Magadha and Kosala. Ajatashatru annexed Kosala and it remained under Magadhan rule until the fall of Magadha. It is clear that Magadha's hegemony did not allow the growth of Saketa as a political centre. However, Ayodhya remained a commercial centre. This situation continued for the next 300 years (i.e. 485–200 BC).

There are no literary sources which relate the hegemony of Magadha over Saketa. The rule of Ashoka Maurya is also not documented though it is certain that Ashoka commemorated all places connected with the Buddha by the erection of *stupas* and *viharas*. Saketa was one of the places where the Buddha himself had dwelt, and Ashoka is known to have erected *stupas* and *viharas* to commemorate his ardent faith.[23]

It is believed that the kingdoms and their capitals listed in the Jaina canon indicate the *bhuktis* or provinces of the Mauryan Empire. In that case, Saketa must have been the capital of Kosala. The Jaina presence in Saketa is suggested by a grey terracotta figure tentatively identified by B.B. Lal with a Jaina ascetic. According to Lal, it is ascribable to circa the fourth century BC.

Notwithstanding the lack of epigraphical evidence, the conclusion that Saketa was devoid of Buddhist buildings and activities during the reign of Ashoka is not warranted. As a matter of fact, there is important archaeological evidence in favour of the existence of Buddhist building near Ayodhya. These remains have escaped the attention of scholars, with the exception of Cunningham.[24]

Saketa became unimportant during Mauryan rule. It rose again in importance during the period of the decline of the Mauryas. After 190 BC, the Mitra dynasty ruled in Ayodhya/Saketa and they tried to develop it into a military stronghold. It eclipsed the old capital of Sravasti, which had sunk into insignificance around

AD 400. During this time it was visited by Fa-hein who observed 'there are very few inhabitants in the city altogether perhaps about 200 families'. Hans Bakker feels that there is another reason why Saketa eventually outstripped Sravasti:

> *During the sixth to third centuries BC, the important highway that connected Pataliputra with Taxila passed through Sravasti, no matter whether one took the northern route from Pataliputra through Vaisali and Lumbini, or the southern one through Varanasi and Saketa. At first this northern route through Lumbini may have fallen into disuse. However, the main route from Pataliputra to Taxila also eventually shifted southwards, cutting short the road from Saketa to Ahicchatra [the capital of the Panchala territory] by leaving Sravasti to the north. A direct connection was established between Saketa and Ahicchatra through Kanyakubj (Kanauj). The route from Kanauj to Saketa is attested by the itinerary of both Chinese pilgrims and later by Alberuni who described the route from Kanauj (Bari) to the mouth of the Ganges. The fact that first 'the Greeks' and then Kanishka are said to have conquered Saketa before being capable of marching on Pataliputra indicates that this southward diversion of the east-west highway was already effectuated in the last two centuries BC. Herewith the strategic position of Saketa controlling the access to the eastern part of the Ganges basin was consolidated.*[25]

At the beginning of the fourth century AD, the (independent) kingdom of Kosala was, for the second time in its history, confronted with the rising power of Magadha and soon succumbed to it. Chandragupta I (AD 320) began expanding westwards. He was aware that, along with Prayag, Saketa was of strategic importance in the control of the area up to Kasi. Samudragupta consolidated the empire and placed Saketa under the direct rule of Pataliputra. The Guptas, unlike the Mauryas who had offered opportunities to the Buddhists to grow, laid the foundation for a renewal of Brahminical institutions and learning during the fourth century AD. The revival of Ayodhya and, with it Brahminism, was so great that when the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hein came to the city he hardly found anything of Buddhist interest.

The fifth century AD marked the crucial phase in the political

and religious development of the town. Saketa had been restored to its legendary glory. Some scholars relate the glory of Saketa with the growing importance of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Rama, believing that the Guptas consciously helped in enhancing the importance of Ayodhya because they wanted to use the idea of the *avatar* of Rama to support their deification of kings. The archaeological findings of B.B. Lal, however, show that it was not present-day Ayodhya which was re-built by the Guptas since no Gupta layers were found in the excavations at Ramkot. He observes:

> *It is rather remarkable that the Gupta Period is not significantly indicated at this site, a fact also noticed in the first season's dig in 1975. After the early historic deposits, there is a break in occupation, with considerable debris and pit formations before the site was again occupied in the eleventh century.*[26]

The Karamdanda inscription gives us some information about the period of Kumaragupta I (AD 415–455). Found 24 km south-west of Ayodhya, it gives the name of the governor of Kosala, the capital of which was called Ayodhya. The inscription informs us that in AD 436, the former minister and governor, and at that time the superintendent of the office of the commander-in-chief of the Emperor Kumaragupta, Prithivisena, made an offering to some Brahmins from Ayodhya on the occasion of a religious procession. It is clear from the inscription that Prithivisena was a devotee of Shiva.

Skandagupta succeeded Kumaragupta I and ruled from AD 455 to AD 467. It is assumed that his military victories may well have inspired him to assume the title of 'Vikramaditya'. It is believed that he shifted the capital from Pataliputra to Saketa.

> *The vanquisher of the Hunas, Skandgupta, liked to compare himself with Rama and the choice of Saketa as the new capital might have offered good opportunity to invigorate the ideology of his power. The restoration of the capital of yore, the renascence of the glory of Iksvaku, was a theme that was prominent in circles attached to the Gupta court of this time. Kalidasa, who lived in the middle of the fifth century AD, may have projected the actual events in the realm of saga by relating*

(for the first time) in the Raghuvamsa, the story of Rama's son Kusa returning to the capital of his forbears in order to restore her ancient magnificence. By the explicit identification of Ayodhya with Saketa, the poet might have endeavourea to endorse the aspirations of his patron, the Gupta emperor.[27]

Paramartha's *Life of Vasubandhu* and Huen-tsang's *Si-yu-ki* tell us that Saketa (Ayodhya) was a centre of Buddhist activity during the middle of the fifth century AD. The two works could be considered literary testimony to the second stratum of Buddhist monuments found in Ayodhya. It can be presumed that besides the new monasteries, the previously ruined *stupa* of Maṇi-Parbat was restored. This would account for the two archaeological layers that were discovered in the mound by Cunningham and it also explains how it was possible for Fa-hein to see only the ruins of the stupa in AD 410, while Huen-tsang, who came two centuries later, found an old *Sanghavama* about 1.5 km from the city next to a stupa.

After this, Ayodhya seems to have declined in importance. It remained significant only as a strategic place from where the north and east of India could be controlled. However, the loss of its position of eminence did not imply a decline in its importance as a town. Huen-tsang visited the capital of the kingdom of O-yu-to during the reign of King Harsha of Kanauj (AD 636–640). At that time, Ayodhya had become a part of Kanauj and it is probable that it might have been the seat of a feudatory vassal or merely an administrative officer. Huen-tsang wrote about the prosperity of Ayodhya and maintained that until that time it was a famous centre of Buddhist activity.

In the four centuries after the death of Harsha in AD 647, North India was divided into several petty kingdoms. It is probable that Ayodhya might have been one of them; however, it was neighbouring Kanauj which became politically more significant. As a consequence religious activity in Kanauj was accelerated. The period 650–1050 is practically a blank for Ayodhya. It is in the case of such darkness that myths are generally thrown up to fill the blanks.

The obscurity that shrouds Ayodhya in the seventh century

begins to lift from the eleventh century, with the penetration of the Turks in the area. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni attacked Kanauj in 1019 and, two years later, the provincial headquarters at Bari were also brought under his sway. It appears that Ghazni's forces soon withdrew from Bari. The first penetration by Turkish forces in Ayodhya was that of Sayad Salar Masud Ghazi.[28] It is presumed that, after 1034, another Muslim attack on Ayodhya was dealt. Ahmad Niyaltigin, the Ghaznavid governor of the Punjab raided Benares in 1034. It is said that either he himself or one of his chiefs went to Ayodhya.[29]

Soon after the Turks withdrew, the Hindu kingdom was re-established in the area. Members of the Rashtrakuta dynasty are said to have ruled Ayodhya from Kanauj. The imperial city of Kanauj was sacked by a Ghaznavid governor between 1086 and 1090, thus the Rajput clan of the Gahadavalas headed by Chandradeya usurped Kanauj. In the absence of any strong ruler in Ayodhya, the city must also have come under their control. After 1190, the Turkish forces became active again, in 1198. Muhammad Ghori attacked Ayodhya. He was accompanied by Makhdum Shah Juran Ghori who is said to have destroyed several places of worship in Ayodhya.[30] The *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of Minaj-ud-din Siraj states that political affairs remained unsettled in Ayodhya for a long time. It was in 1228, when Malik Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, son of the third Mamluk Sultan of Delhi, Shams-ud-din Iltutmish, was appointed the governor of Avadh that affairs in Ayodhya became settled. Malik faced local resistance in the beginning but he was soon able to control it and peace was restored.[31] The new governor started using Ayodhya as a base for northward expansion.

The Turkish governors were still eager to expand north and eastwards of Ayodhya. They stationed garrisons in the town and, for the purpose of defence, also undertook the construction of a fort, after 1279/80. William Finch observed that a wall, encircling the town was 'built foure hundred years agoe'.[32]

Ayodhya rose in prosperity during the rule of the Tughlaqs. Quarters for administrative and military officials stationed in Ayodhya were raised between the ghats of Swargaddwar and the north side of Ramkot. During the reign of Mohammad-bin-Tughlaq, Ayodhya was governed for a long time by Malik Ainul

Mulk Multani and several nobles from Delhi chose to settle in Avadh. The fort of Ayodhya was completed at this time.

Avadh became part of the Sharqi kingdom of Jaunpur towards the end of the fourteenth century. It was recovered by Bahlol Lodi, but the Sharqi period was remembered with nostalgia and there was growing resentment against the Afghan Lodis.[33]

Soon after the defeat of Ibrahim Lodi at Panipat, Avadh also fell into Babur's hands.[34] The throne was retained by the Mughals till the defeat of Humayun by Sher Shah and his Afghans.[35]

After the reconquest of Delhi by Humayun, Avadh and Jaunpur remained in the hands of the Afghan nobles, and it was not until 1559 that Akbar sent Ali Quli Khan 'Khan Zaman', eastwards. The expedition was successful; Jaunpur and Benares were occupied, and Ayodhya again came under the Mughals.[36]

During the reign of Akbar, there was heightened religious activity in North India. As a reaction to the Sufis, the worshippers of Krishna started preaching the idea of devotion to a personal god. It seems probable that Rama *bhakti* also started growing during these years, although it is certain that no sects of Rama *bhaktas* appeared in Ayodhya or elsewhere during the sixteenth century. It was at this time that Guru Nanak came to Ayodhya. The raised spot where he had addressed the people is identified. Next to it is a modern gurudwara.

After the death of Akbar in 1605, different religious traditions continued to grow in Ayodhya. It was during the period of Jahangir and Shahjahan that Ayodhya's significance as a religious place for the Hindus started rising. It gradually became an important pilgrimage. It is believed that the compilation of the *Mahatmyas* began at this time. During the reign of Jahangir, Rama's association with Ayodhya became popularly accepted. It was during this time that the English traveller, William Finch, came to Ayodhya (1608–11) and observed that there were several myths related with Rama. He apparently heard most of them but does not mention anything about the Ramjanambhoomi temple.

Aurangzeb ascended the throne in 1658 and he adopted several strict measures. He imposed the poll-tax on Hindus and also demolished some temples. After his death in 1707, strict control by any authority in Ayodhya weakened and conditions of anarchy

and civil war prevailed in Avadh. It was during this time that fierce battles were fought between the Vaishnava *Bairagis* and Shaiva *Sanyasins* over the question of the possession of religious places in Ayodhya. It was only after 1722 that affairs in Avadh started settling down, with the appointment of Mir Muhammed Amin as governor of Avadh. A Shia of Persian stock, he was given the title of Saadat Khan Bahadur.

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23. Ibid., p. 14.
24. See A. Cunningham, *Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. I.
25. Hans Bakker, op. cit., p. 22.
26. B.B. Lal, 1976–77, op. cit., p. 53.
27. Hans Bakker, op. cit., p. 30.
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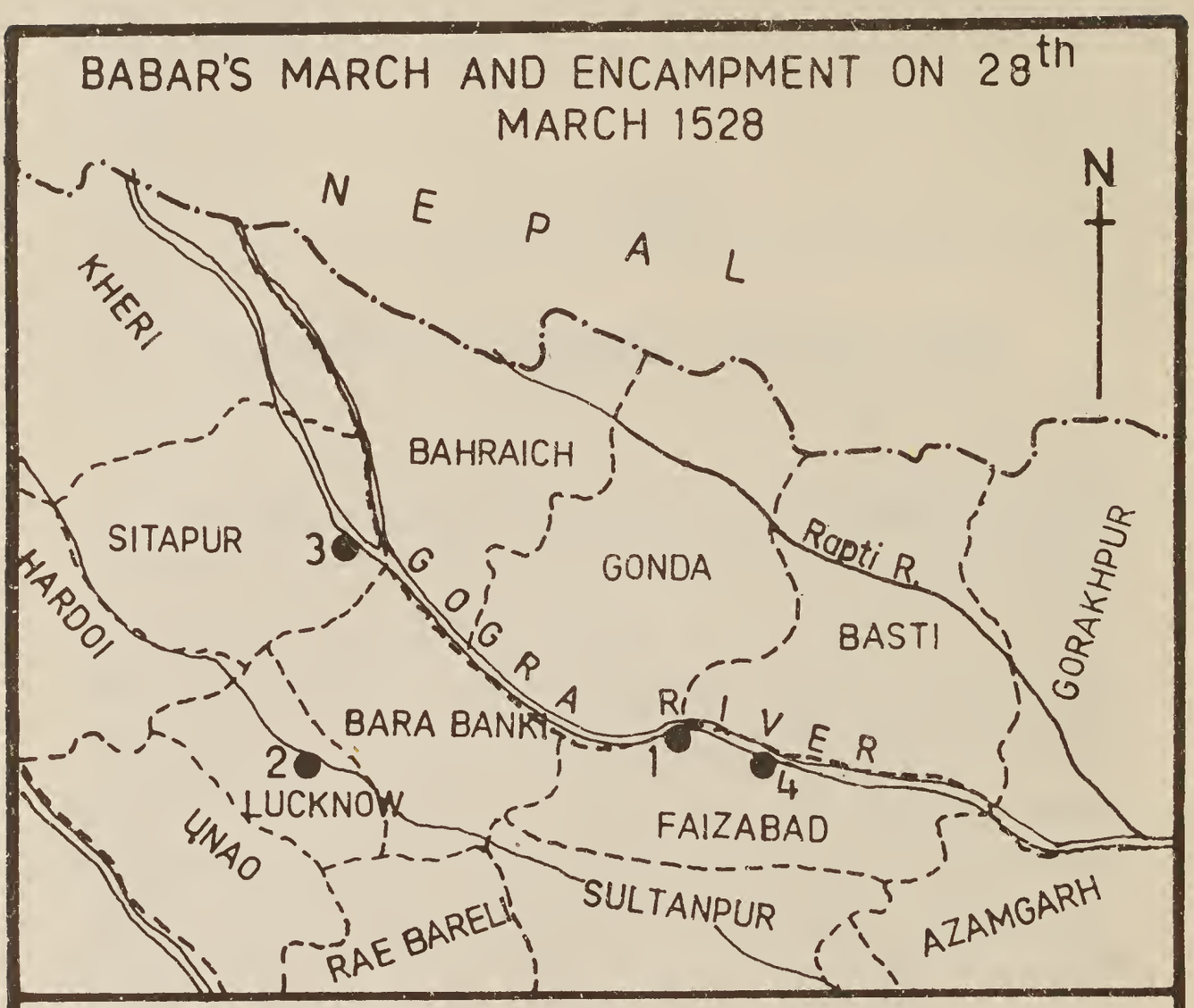
Chapter Five

Did Babur Build the Masjid?

The popular belief that Babur and Aurangzeb destroyed temples in Ayodhya was bolstered by the theories that appeared since the advent of British rule in India. It has been held that the Muslim rulers were committed to the expansion of Islam, and that they made a policy of destroying Hindu temples to oppress Hindus and to convert them. However, this belief cannot be substantiated. There is no concrete historical evidence that the Mughal emperors, Babur and Aurangzeb, ever came to Ayodhya. Nor is there any historical basis for the belief that Babur and Aurangzeb ordered the breaking of temples in Ayodhya. In any case, if the Mughal rulers had undertaken the destruction of Hindu temples as their pious duty, they failed utterly. Neither was the Hindu population reduced considerably nor was there a significant decrease in the number of Hindu temples. This belief would also suggest that the Mughals were more fanatical than their predecessors, the Turkish Sultans. Long before the alleged visit of Babur to Ayodhya, the city had been invaded by Turkish soldiers under Sayad Salar Masud, in 1030. In 1194, Avadh was annexed to the Delhi Sultanate and the area had Muslim rulers from then on. The local myths do not accuse them of having destroyed Hindu temples. But history seems to believe that the Mughal emperors were more intolerant towards Hindu subjects than the Turkish sultans.

Some Muslim rulers did destroy Hindu temples. The practice was followed largely by the early Turkish Sultans, primarily for economic gains and also for reasons of facility. Subsequent Muslim rulers destroyed Hindu temples to glorify their own reigns and also as acts of retribution. One view is that several temples were



REFERENCES

1 AYODHYA

2 BABAR IN LUCKNOW ON 21st MARCH 1528

3 BABAR ENCAMPED AT THIS PLACE ON 28th MARCH 1528

4 SERWA (Leyden's Position of Babar on 28th March 1528)

0 24 48 96

mile

destroyed by the later Muslim rulers because they had become centres of unlawful activity. The early Turkish conquerors did not consider settling down in India. They came as conquerors and returned after looting the treasuries of defeated chieftains and of the temples. Hindu temples, ornate and rich as they were, were the best and most convenient sources for loot. The gold idols decorated with precious stones lured them to break the idols and destroy the temples. Some Muslim rulers quoted Islamic principles to justify their acts of desecration. The enunciation of religious ideals got them the emotional support of their soldiers in conducting such plunder. The destruction of Hindu temples also conformed to the age-old practice of the destruction of the grand structures of predecessors. In fact, some Muslim buildings were also destroyed.

The Turkish Sultans believed that any ruling dynasty needed grand structures to symbolise their glory. They constructed tombs, mosques and other buildings as memorials to themselves. However, the early Sultans lacked the artisans, material and technical knowledge to build. They were naturally dependent upon indigenous resources though they made efforts to conform to the pattern of Islamic architecture. It was because of this that the mosques, tombs and buildings constructed during those years largely used the material of the fallen Hindu temples or other buildings. Pillars, carved columns and blocks, and huge stones with inscriptions were used in the structures that were raised during those times. This can be seen in the Islamic structures that were constructed in Delhi during the time of the early Turkish Sultans. This was especially true as long as expertise was unavailable and artisans from Persia and Central Asia had not settled in India. Even the later Turkish Sultans continued to utilise indigenous methods and material from the destroyed buildings to construct tombs and mosques. Ziya-ud-din Desai observes:

> *The Islamic architecture of India is an interesting story of these two seemingly opposite styles mingling with each other with varying degrees in different parts of the country at different periods of time, depending upon climatic conditions, type and availability of material and similar other factors. It is for this reason that the features of Indian style are found freely employed in the Muslim monuments of India. The*

qualities of strength and grace, typical of the Hindu ornaments were borrowed by the Muslims who also did not frequently use the trabeate system. On the other hand, the conceptions of breadth and spaciousness and the methods of spanning big spaces with arches and covering large areas with domes were essentially Islamic.[1]

Mehr Afshan Farooqui asserts that although Turkish rule in India introduced Islamic institutions and inaugurated an age of expansion in trade, commerce and agriculture, the social, political and economic life of India remained undisturbed. Indians did not show any resentment against the introduction of Islamic institutions, perhaps because this introduction was gradual. Farooqui is certain that these institutions were only introduced in urban areas. In the countryside, the old system of land settlement continued without any break.[2] The land rights of *Mahants* and *purohits* were unaffected. It is unlikely that mosques were constructed on the exact spot of the destroyed temples, since rights in land were not generally disturbed, as even Montgomery Martin, who compiled the topographical and other statistical data on eastern India in 1838 and was fairly critical of the period of Muslim rule in India, testifies.[3]

Benet, who was directly involved with the settlement of land in Avadh in 1866, writes:

The pivot upon which all the modern local history of a district like Fyzabad turns is the possession of land. Immutable custom sways nearly everything else. There have been, except very lately, no religious disturbances even much less wars, no extensive proselytism, there has been no foreign invasion, there has been no change in sovereignty, no great inventions such as printing press, steam engine, railway, electric telegraph, powerloom; the tribal or caste system, the law of inheritance, the dress, the ornaments, the food, the language, the very boats and carts and ploughs, ... all are the same as 1,500 years ago. The tribal tenure of land on the contrary has fluctuated extremely, and its distribution sheds much light on the internal condition of the district.[4]

Of the Mughal emperors, Akbar definitely passed through Ayodhya, but there are no myths about his presence. In fact,

Akbar was rather amused at the penchant of the local people, both Hindu and Muslim, for myths regarding places of worship.[5]

Babur has been labelled the principal villain, yet the charges against him do not agree at all with the known personality of Babur. He was a fine soldier, an able administrator and a prolific writer and was not a religious fanatic in any way.[6] A close reading of the *Babur-Nama* reveals that he was an extremely God-fearing man but in no way opposed to religions other than Islam. It is true that he did ridicule the life and practices of ascetics of some sects of Hinduism but he never attempted to abolish that system. There are numerous instances in the *Babur-Nama* where he has praised the art, architecture and sculpture associated with Hindu temples. He disapproved of nude idols but was not an iconoclast. A sharp observer, Babur always found time to record anything that appealed to his aesthetic sense. He does not mention any incident when he or his men ever destroyed any Hindu temple.[7]

In his memoirs, Babur does not even say that he visited Ayodhya. He only mentions that he was stationed in Avadh on the banks of the river Ghagra. He observes that, on 28 March 1528, he was stationed in the north of Avadh on the junction of two rivers. The activities of Babur during the period 2 April 1528 to 8 September 1528 are unknown. This is because the pages giving an account of Babur's activities on these days are missing. The myth has developed because of this absence of information.

Both the local Hindus and Muslims describe the same circumstances, with slight variations, of the construction of Babur's mosque. They say Babur ordered the destruction of the Ramjanambhoomi temple on the recommendation of a Muslim *faqir* or ascetic. When Babur came to Ayodhya, goes the story, the Ramjanambhoomi area was under the control of Mahatma Shyamananda. He was also the caretaker of the Ramjanambhoomi temple. Shyamananda was a very famous saint and he did not believe in any distinctions of sect or creed. He had several Muslim disciples. It is said that the *faqirs*, Fazl Abbas Musa Aashikan and Jalalshah, took shelter with him. Impressed by the huge crowds of people who came for the *darshan* of the Ramjanambhoomi temple, they thought that if there was a mosque at the same spot, they would be able to control it and become as popular. Dr Radhey

Shyam Shukla holds that the two *faqirs* were encouraged by the popularity of the tomb of Syed Salar Masud in Bahraich, which he believes was constructed after destroying the Hindu temple of *Balark Kund* in Bahraich.[8] He contends that thousands of Hindus congregate there not for the *darshan* of the *mazaar* but because they know that there was once a temple there.[9]

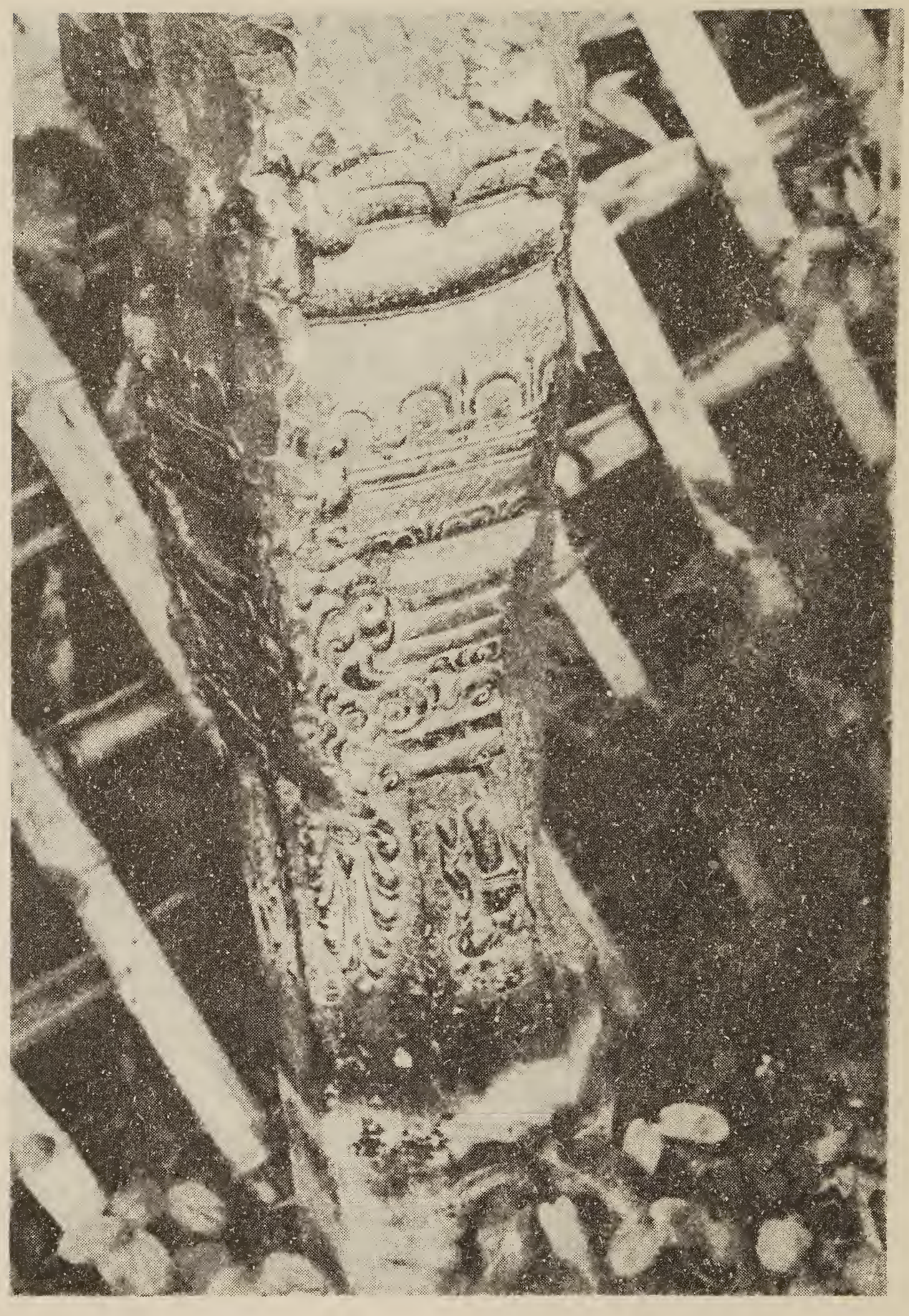
The myth further says that, when the two *faqirs* were with Shyamananda, Babur arrived in Ayodhya. They approached him with their proposal and forced him to agree to the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Some hold the opinion that Musa Aashikan was impressed by the spiritual atmosphere of the Ramjanambhoomi. He often sat inside the temple. One day, he was thrown out, and swore to destroy it. Yet another story in circulation relates that, when Babur came to Ayodhya, he was exhausted, having been at war with the Rajputs and having come to fight the Pathans in Ayodhya. He had been unable to suppress the latter and was feeling disspirited. He approached a large number of religious men, both Hindu and Muslim, to bless him with victory in war against the Pathans. In Ayodhya he heard about the miracles of the *faqirs*, Musa Aashikan and Jalalshah. He went to seek their blessings and it was then that Musa Aashikan asked him to destroy the Ramjanambhoomi temple and construct the Babri Masjid in its place. Musa Aashikan told Babur that, once he completed this pious task, his mission would be accomplished.[10]

The local myths are associated with the widespread belief that Babur came to Ayodhya on 28 March 1528. It was the British scholars and administrators who strengthened the idea. John Leyden said so in his 1813 translation of Babur's memoirs.[11] He made direct reference to the fact that the activities of Babur in Ayodhya are unknown as the pages of the diary relating to the emperor's activities between 2 April and 18 September 1528 are missing. This revelation by Leyden was followed by the claim of Martin in 1834[12] that he had been to the Babri Masjid and found black stone pillars in the mosque. They were un-Islamic and therefore must have been taken from a Hindu temple. In 1854, William Erskine also published a translation of the memoirs and he too contended that Babur was in Ayodhya on 28 March 1528. In 1873,

1. A black-stone pillar standing in Faizabad Cantonment which is identical to the controversial pillar in the Babri Masjid.

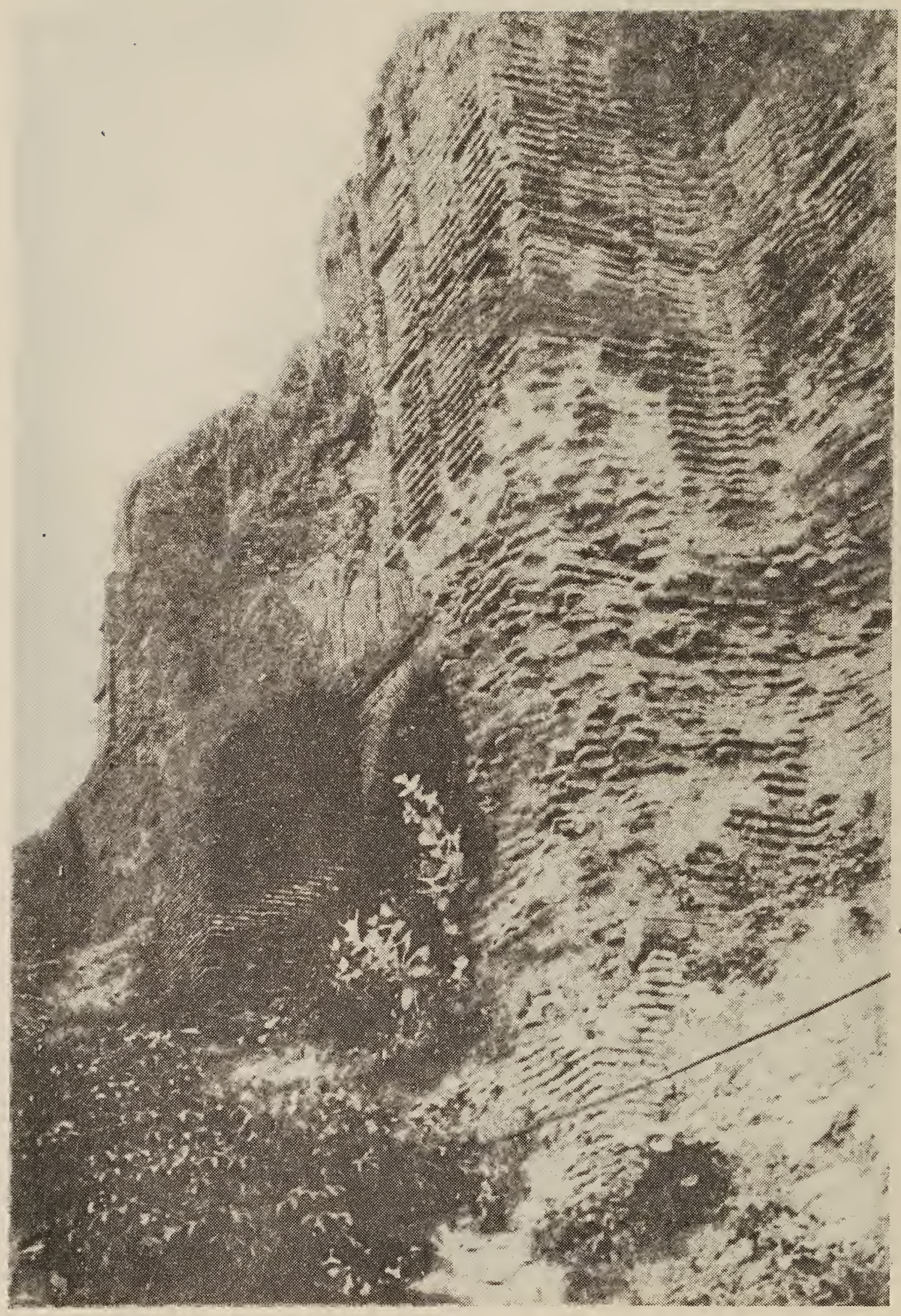
2. *One face of the black-stone pillar showing the intricate carvings.*

3. *The dancing woman carved on one of the faces of the black-stone pillar.*



4. The controversial black-stone pillar at the head of the grave of the local saint, Musa Aashikan, in Ayodhya.

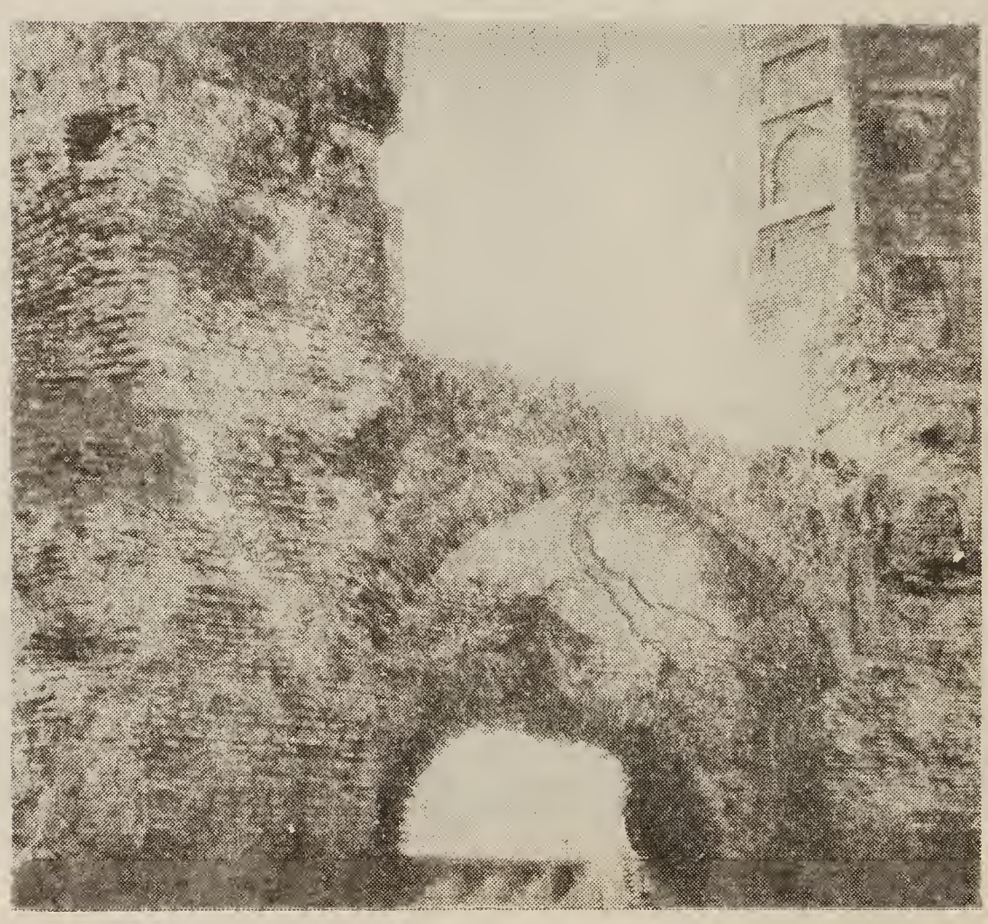
5. *The baked-mud structure situated on the embankment along the River Ghagra at Ayodhya.*



6. *A mosque in ruins at the Treta-ke-Thakur, Ayodhya.*

7. *The Kaikeyee Bhawan, Ayodhya (situated north of Kaushalya Bhawan and north-east of the Babri Masjid).*

8. The Babri Masjid as seen from the west.



9. The ruined mosque, said to have been erected by Aurangzeb, at Swargadwar, Ayodhya.

H.M. Elliot repeated this view.[13] In 1860, Carnegy made a direct reference to Babur having destroyed the Ramjanambhoomi temple.[14] In 1877, W.C. Benet supported the contention of Carnegy. Elliot made an indirect reference to Babur's destruction of the famous Ramjanambhoomi temple. He contended that Babur constructed the mosque on the spot of the fallen temple. Consequently, archaeologists adopted the same thinking. Cunningham in 1865[15] and Fuhrer in 1891[16] repeated the local traditions. All the British scholars and administrators who have been quoted above wrote in the nineteenth century. They were convinced that Babur visited Ayodhya and had been involved in some mysterious activity there.

It appears that the local myths were granted respectability by John Leyden in 1813, even though Annette Susannah Beveridge corrected the fallacy in 1921.[17] She wrote that Babur was stationed some distance north of Ayodhya on 28 March 1528. [See Map I]

Leyden's mistake was natural because he was not at all acquainted with the geography of the area around Ayodhya. Also, he committed the error because of the complexities of the script. Babur's memoirs were compiled in Turki and translated into Persian. Leyden's English translation is from the Persian version. Both Erskine and Elliot also saw the Persian manuscript and both made the same mistake as Leyden. Beveridge saw both the Turki and Persian manuscripts and was able to correctly locate Babur's camp on that contentious day (28 March 1528).

Leyden said, on the basis of the details in the *Babur-Nama*, that Babur encamped 4 to 6 miles north of Aud at the junction of the two rivers Sirwa and Ghagra.[18] He concluded, wrongly, that Aud and Ayodhya were the same. It is a historical fact that, since the Muslim penetration in Avadh, a larger area around Ayodhya came to be called Aud. Ibn Batuta, in fact, refers to the whole area between the rivers Gumti and Ghagra as Aud.[19] Leyden's location of the place is not supported by local geography, a close study of which reveals that no river by the name of Sirwa ever flowed in any part of North India. Leyden probably mistook the ferry port of Serwa for the junction of the two rivers, 'Sirwa' [sic] and Ghagra. The ferry port of Serwa is situated 16 miles south of Ayodhya. This

mistake was repeated by Erskine and Elliot. The latter, in fact, made an attempt to provide a geographical location and hence shifted the place of Babur's encampment to the south of Ayodhya.

Beveridge gives us the actual location of Babur's camp on 28 March 1528. She concluded that Babur was encamped at the junction of the rivers Sirda and Ghagra.[20] She stayed in Faizabad for two months and acquainted herself well with the local geography. She was convinced that the location of Babur's camp had to be in the north of Ayodhya. She concluded that *Kali-Sarda-Chauka*, an affluent of the river Ghagra was actually the river Sird(a), as mentioned in the memoirs. She did not consider the river Saryu (the stretch of the Ghagra that flows by Ayodhya is generally referred to by the local people as the Saryu) the same as the Sird(a). She arrived at her conclusions on the basis of the geographical location and the nature of the rivers. She wrote, 'To so take it seems warranted by the context; there could be no need for the fords on the Sarju to be examined, and its position is not suitable.[21] The river Sarda was shallow while the river Sarju (Ghagra) was a fast-flowing river. The junction of the two rivers Kali-Sarda-Chauka known as Sarda (Sird[a] in the memoirs) and Ghagra was north of Gonda and south of Bahraich. The junction of the two rivers was and still is 72 miles north of Ayodhya. The memoirs state that the junction of the two rivers was 2 or 3 *kurohs* (1 *kuroh* = 1 kos = 2 miles) above Aud. We have already mentioned that Aud was generally taken to be the area between the rivers Gomti/Gumti and Ghagra. In the *Mirat-i-Masudi* as well as in the *Rahela* of Ibn Batuta, Aud had been taken to be the area between the rivers Gomti and Ghagra.[22] Thus, it would be more appropriate to say that Babur was encamped at the junction of the two rivers, Sird(a) and Ghagra, which was 4 or 5 miles north of the northern limits of Aud.

John Leyden and, after him, Erskine and Elliot committed the mistake of reading 'Sirwa' instead of 'Sirda'. This was strongly probable because of the writing of the manuscript and their ignorance of local geography. They do observe that Babur was a keen observer and always gave minute details about the place that he visited. Had Babur encamped just north of Ayodhya, he would have almost definitely recorded that in Ayodhya the river Ghagra

is called river Saryu. Leyden and the other two scholars were not aware that the river flowing by Ayodhya was the river Ghagra, called the Saryu by the local people. These three scholars translated the Persian version of the memoirs of Babur, which is a translation of the original Turki. Because of the script, they read

DAL (د) AS WAO (و)

In the Persian script, these letters appear similar. It is easy for a person who is not very familiar with any proper name to commit this mistake. As such, anyone can read

SIRDA (سردا) AS SERWA (سروا)

A close reading of the text reveals that Babur described the river Sirda as shallow and with fords which could be used for crossing. The river Saryu (Ghagra) is deep and fast-flowing and the fords would be impassable. The river Sirda (Sarda) is, however, shallow and has fords. Beveridge translated the Turki manuscript of Babur's memoirs and also acquainted herself well with the geography of the area around Faizabad. We can safely agree with her that Babur camped 72 miles north of Ayodhya, at the junction of the rivers Sarda and Ghagra, on 28 March 1528.

It is therefore doubtful that Babur ever came to Ayodhya. Those who claim that Babur destroyed the famous Ramjanam-bhoomi temple in Ayodhya and ordered the construction of a mosque known today by his name on the spot are convinced that Babur was in Ayodhya between 29 March and 18 September 1528. They argue that Babur or some one after him deliberately obliterated the account of his activities in Ayodhya during the period. They say that this was done with a view to consolidate the Mughal Empire in India. This argument is based on the observation that is said to have been made by Babur regarding his activities after March 29. This is projected on the basis of a document that is said to have been written by Babur, where he observed:

After spending several days pleasantly in that place where there are gardens, running water, well-designed buildings, trees particularly

mango-trees, and various birds of coloured plumage, I ordered the march towards Ghazipur.[23]

Beveridge came across this document while translating the memoirs. She found it in Erskine's own codex of the *Waqiat-i-Babri*.[24] According to her, several circumstances isolate the document from the context of the main text. She was certain that it was very different in the nature of its writing from the text of the Persian translation of the memoirs compiled by Abdur-Rahim. Again, it was inconsistent with the narration because Babur does not march to Ayodhya in AH 935. It was because of this factor that she gives the translation of the document in the appendices.[25]

This document had been brought into prominence by Erskine. He says that he received it in 1826 while he was compiling his translation of the memoirs. Erskine used the document in his work of 1854.

Babur cannot be accused of deliberately removing the pages from the memoirs. He himself observed in his memoirs that on 25 May 1529 there was a strong storm and several tents were uprooted. He also said that pages of his writing flew away and were lost.[26] It is said that he removed the pages because he was afraid that the posterity would blame him as an iconoclast. Babur was no visionary and he could not have concluded that in the nineteenth century some people would begin to label his actions as sinful if they came to know about his activities in Ayodhya. It is surprising that the people who contend that Babur suppressed the pages for fear of being charged for the sinful activities are the ones who hold the popular opinion that Babur had been convinced by the *faqirs* that the destruction of the Ramjanambhoomi temple was a religious act.

Nor can Babur's successors be blamed. Humayun had the *Tuzuk-i-Humayuni* compiled and made reference to the memoirs of Babur. Akbar asked Abul Fazl to compile the *Akbar-Nama* and asked two men to translate the *Babur-Nama* for Abul Fazl's reference. Later, Abdur Rahim undertook and completed the translation of the *Babur-Nama* in Persian. None of these successors is likely to have removed the missing pages.

The Mughals were the emperors of Hindustan and were quite

convinced of their own glory. They never questioned the future of the Mughal Empire in India. Nor did they imagine that a time would come when their actions would be questioned. Since the successors of Babur allowed Babur's sarcastic remarks regarding the way of life of the Hindu ascetics to remain in the memoirs, it would be surprising if they erased the record of his activities in Ayodhya. If the pages were destroyed for fear that they would incite Hindu subjects against the empire, then the Mughal emperors should also have removed the Persian inscriptions on the inside and outside of the mosque. The allegation presupposes that, as Babur had destroyed the Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya, the Hindus were already disturbed. In that case, the mosque in Ayodhya would always remind the people of the destroyed Ramjanambhoomi temple and the removal of Babur's testimony would not make any difference. In all probability, only two alternatives were available to the Mughal emperors if the Ramjanambhoomi temple had existed in Ayodhya. They could have completely done away with any evidence that would remind the Hindus of the destroyed temple. Along with the pages of the memoirs they should have also demolished the mosque with its inscriptions. Or, they could have openly claimed that it was the pious duty of Muslims to demolish any place of worship of the infidels and, therefore, the destruction of the Ramjanambhoomi temple was a holy act on the part of Babur. The Mughal emperors chose neither of the two alternatives. This makes one wonder if there was ever a Shri Ramjanambhoomi temple on the spot of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

The idea that Babur or one of his successors deliberately removed the relevant pages from his memoirs first appeared in the early part of the nineteenth century. The idea of the age-old antagonism between the Hindus and Muslims of India also belongs to this time. We must observe that during the Mughal period fairly cordial relations between Hindus and Muslims existed and these continued into the nineteenth century. In fact, the first Hindu–Muslim conflict arose in a territory that had been brought under the control of the British. In 1805, rioting broke out in Benares. The Hindus went on the rampage against the Muslims to avenge the alleged destruction of the Vishwanath temple by Aurangzeb. In

this conflict, forty mosques were destroyed and a few people were killed.[27] It was soon afterwards that James Stuart Mill circulated the idea of an inherent conflict between Hindus and Muslims. It was in this environment that some Englishmen claimed to have unearthed a document that indicated that Babur had stayed in Ayodhya.

A complete and close reading of the memoirs of Babur convincingly shows that Babur was encamped north of Aud on 28 March 1528. He records, on 2 April, that he went out to hunt in the area north of the camp as he had heard it was a fine hunting ground. He must have left the area of the controversial encampment immediately, as he recorded on 28 March 1528 that he had asked to find ways to cross the river. This expressed his anxiety to settle the affairs of Avadh. As such, it is clear that Babur was more involved in the task of consolidating his kingdom than in serving the interests of his religion. On the basis of the memoirs, we are forced to doubt if Babur ever went to Ayodhya. This doubt further raises suspicion regarding the presence of the Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya.

* * *

The Muslims of Ayodhya/Faizabad, like their Hindu counterparts, have several myths about their places of worship. The stories relate to the several graves, roads and mosques in Ayodhya/Faizabad. They also believe that Emperor Babur came to Ayodhya in 1528 and destroyed the famous Ramjanambhoomi temple, to propitiate Pir Fazal Abbas Musa Aashikan. The Muslim saint lived in the area south-west of the Ramjanambhoomi temple, where there is, today, a graveyard said to contain the grave of the saint. His tomb is marked by two inverted black-stone pillars half-buried in the earth [see Plate 4]. The local Muslims are convinced that the use of the black stone pillars in the mosque indicates that the material of the Ramjanambhoomi temple was used in the construction of the mosque. They further claim that similar pillars were put at the head of the grave as a mark of respect.

The local Hindus say the original temple along with other temples in Ayodhya had gone into oblivion until, in the fifth century AD,

Bikramjeet (a corruption of Vikramaditya) came to Ayodhya during one of his military campaigns and, after a divine revelation, decided to re-establish the several places of worship associated in some way with the life of Rama. In this way, Bikramjeet established 360 places of worship of Rama and the most important among them was the Ramjanambhoomi temple. They relate that the Ramjanambhoomi temple constructed by Bikramjeet rested on 84 pillars made of black-stone which they claim is the *kasauti* stone (touchstone).

As a matter of fact, the black-stone pillars belong to a period between the tenth and eleventh centuries. Abul Fazl, who said the city was also called the city of Rama or Ramjanambhoomi, ridicules the local Muslims for revering graves which they considered to be those of the *paigambaras*, Sis and Ayub.[28] Abul Fazl gives no information regarding the Babri Masjid and the Ramjanambhoomi temple. This forces us to contend that there was never any Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya and that, until the time of Akbar, the contentious mosque was not known as Babur's mosque. It came to be called the Babri Masjid at a later period.

It is true that several non-Islamic elements have been freely used in the construction of the mosque. These include the black-stone pillars, the carving of a *varaha* (boar, an *avatar* of Vishnu) on the outside enclosure of the Masjid, and the wooden beam just below the arch. The two inscriptions, one on the inside and the other outside the mosque, suggest that the Babri Masjid was constructed at the behest of Babur.

The black-stone pillars used in the Babri Masjid are remarkable in that very few structures with such pillars now exist. We found eighteen similar pillars in Ayodhya and Faizabad. There are fourteen black-stone pillars used in the Babri Masjid and two identical pillars at the head of Musa Aashikan's grave. The grave is about 600 yards south-west of the mosque. A similar solitary pillar is to be found in the Faizabad Cantonment. There is another black-stone pillar about four feet in height found at the entrance to the Janamasthan temple inside the Kaushalya Bhawan in Ayodhya. In addition to the eighteen black-stone pillars found in Ayodhya and Faizabad, we came across two black-stone pillars kept in the U.P. State Museum, Lucknow. These pillars were brought from a village

in Muzaffarnagar district, Uttar Pradesh. Apart from these, we did not find any other black-stone pillars in U.P. However, we may add that carvings on black stone are known to have been frequently used in Buddhist and Jaina structures.

The first reference to the carved black-stone pillars used in the mosque was made by Montgomery Martin in 1838. He writes:

> *... there are some pillars in the mosque built by Babur. These are of black-stone, and of an order which I have seen nowhere else, and which will be understood from the accompanying drawing. That they have been taken from a Hindu building is evident from the traces of images being observable on some of their bases; although the images have been cut off to satisfy the conscience of the bigot. It is possible that these pillars have belonged to a temple built by Vikrama; but I think the existence of such temples doubtful; and, if they did not exist, it is probable that the pillars were taken from the ruins of the place. They are only 6 feet high.*[29]

Martin gives us a sketch of the pillar. After him, P. Carnegy in the 1860s gives us a description of the pillars used in the Babri Masjid. He writes:

> *If Ayodhya was then little other than a wilderness, it must at least have possessed a fine temple in the Janamasthan; for many of its columns are still in existence and in good preservation, having been used by the Musalmans in the construction of the Babri Mosque. These are of strong, close-grained, dark-coloured or black stone, called by the natives Kasauti (literally touch-stone slates) and are carved with different devices. To my thinking these more strongly resemble Buddhist pillars than those I have seen at Benares and elsewhere. They are from seven to eight feet long, square at the base, centre and capital, round or octagonal intermediately.*[30]

For some time after 1860, British officials continued to observe the presence of the non-Islamic pillars in the Babri Masjid. Surprisingly, before 1838 we do not have any evidence of their presence.

It was clear from the un-Islamic columns in 'Babur's mosque'

that the mosque was constructed from the ruins of a non-Islamic building. We therefore photographed the pillars to date the carvings on them. As we were not allowed to photograph the exterior or the interior of the mosque, we decided to photograph some pillars outside the mosque. The two pillars at the grave of Musa Aashikan were disfigured and the carving was not very clear, so we photographed the lone pillar buried in Faizabad Cantonment. This pillar is in good condition and shows the carvings very clearly. We were also informed that there was a black-stone pillar at the entrance of the Janamasthan temple situated in the Kaushalya Bhawan. This pillar is at the *Jambdwar* and is in an extremely disfigured state. We also photographed the two black-stone pillars kept in the U.P. State Museum, Lucknow. (These pillars at that time were kept in the store-room in the basement of the Museum.)

We showed the photographs of the different pillars to two of the greatest experts on Ancient Indian temple art and architecture. Professor M.A. Dhakay and Professor Krishna Dev of the American Institute for Indian Studies, Ramnagar (Varanasi). They classified the photographs on the basis of the pattern of carvings on the pillars. The pillars at the head of the grave and the pillar at Faizabad Cantonment formed one set. The pillars at the Lucknow Museum were kept in a separate set, and the *Jambdwar* pillar in the Janamasthan temple formed a third category. The two experts agreed that the pattern of carving on the pillars in the first set can be dated to the period between the late ninth and early eleventh century AD. They added that the carvings on the pillars was representative of the art of sculpture developed in Gaya during the time of the Senas. Dhakay and Krishna Dev said that the pillars kept in the U.P. State Museum, Lucknow, were very different from the pillars found in Ayodhya and Faizabad. They dated the carvings on the former pillars to the period after the eleventh century or, more precisely, to the twelfth and thirteenth century. They said that from the carving on the pillar that forms the *jambdwar* of the Janamasthan temple it could be dated to the twelfth century. Thus, the pillar at the Janamasthan temple very closely resembled the pillars kept at the Lucknow Museum. This revelation was very confusing as there is no evidence as to from where the pillar at the Janamasthan temple was originally obtained. However, we do

know that the two pillars kept at the Lucknow Museum were brought from a village in Muzaffarnagar district. Uttar Pradesh.

Both Dhakay and Krishna Dev agree that the pillars used inside the Babri Masjid were un-Islamic and, as such, cannot be considered an integral part of the mosque. They also said that it cannot be said with certainty that the pillars in question were part of a Hindu temple. They could have been a part of either a secular or a religious building. They added that the pillars could have been part of a Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina temple. In fact, at one stage in the history of India; it becomes difficult to clearly demarcate the elements of Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanic art and architecture. A process of assimilation was established between the three faiths from the fifth century AD. Professor Dhakay observes that largely local traditions of art, architecture and sculpture determined the styles of painting, building and carving. Dhakay and Krishna Dev were certain that the pillars must have been brought to Ayodhya from eastern India during the period of either the Palas or Senas. They even pointed out that the style of carving on the controversial pillars was quite typical of Gaya.

The presence of un-Islamic columns inside the mosque and the image of *Varaha* on the outer wall of the mosque confirm that material from a destroyed non-Islamic structure had been used in its construction.

There is historical evidence that Shah Juran Ghori destroyed several temples in Ayodhya. In 1194, Muiz-ud-din Mohammad bin Sam commonly known as Shahab-ud-din Ghori, conquered Avadh after taking Kanauj. Shah Juran Ghori came with Shahab-ud-din Ghori and together they unleashed a reign of terror in Avadh.[31] After some time Shahab-ud-din Ghori left the province, but Shah Juran Ghori stayed back. He indulged in looting and destroying temples and was thus able to amass wealth and property for himself and his family. He died in Ayodhya and the mound on which his tomb was constructed came to be known as *Shah Juran Tila* (the mound of Shah Juran).

Shah Juran Ghori destroyed the famous Jaina temple which is said to have commemorated the birthplace of the Jaina *tirthankara*, Adinath.[32] Jaina religious texts, like the Buddhist religious texts, show that Mahavira often came to Ayodhya to preach. It was also

claimed that the four *tirthankaras* were born in Ayodhya. A scholar claims that, as Ayodhya had come to be revered as the birthplace of the *avatar* of Vishnu, the Jainas also claimed Ayodhya as the birthplace of the *tirthankaras*.[33] Whatever the reason, the fact is that, before the arrival of Shah Juran Ghori in Ayodhya, the idea had become accepted among the Jainas that the four *tirthankaras* were born in Ayodhya. It was therefore certain that there must have been several temples to commemorate the birthplaces of these *tirthankaras*. It is surprising that today we have only Jaina temples of recent origin. It is therefore certain that the old Jaina temples either perished or were destroyed. We must remember that Jainas were generally rich merchants and they assigned huge amount of wealth to the construction of temples. Jaina temples were, therefore, generally rich and well-decorated. There is evidence to show that there was a temple dedicated to Adinath in Murao Tola near Swargaddwar in Ayodhya. Shah Juran Ghori destroyed this temple on the plea that it had nude idols.[34] The real reason may have been the wealth it contained.

The nude idols were thrown into the river. The discovery of the idols at a later period gave rise to an interesting controversy in Ayodhya. P. Carnegy and Benet attest that some idols were recovered from the river-bed near the Swargaddwar. Benet writes:

> *... Statues were discovered underground by some Bairagis about the year* AD *1850, who had their discovery widely proclaimed by beat of drum, setting forth that Shri Jagannath had appeared to them in a dream and had indicated to them where He lay concealed in the ground and that if He were released and set up in the neighbourhood, the necessity for long pilgrimages to Puri would cease. They found Him at the spot indicated and had Him set up as ordered and now proclaimed the fact for the benefit of the pilgrims at large. For one reason the imposition took, and thousands of Hindus made their offerings at the new shrine, and great was their disgust when the fact was afterwards revealed by a learned Pandit that the images pertained to the Bhars who, according to the holy men in question, were in the habit of sacrificing Brahmans to such images, as these ... . Thereafter the images remained unheeded in the dung-heap, till discovered by Mr. Nicholson of the Fyzabad Settlement.*[35]

Today, peculiar idols may be seen at the *Kale Ram Mandir* situated near the Swargaddwar. The myth about the idols in this temple is that these very statues were removed from the Ram-janambhoomi temple at the time of its destruction and thrown in the river. They are said to have been recovered by a Maharashtrian priest and installed by him in the temple.[36] The temple has six statues. The statues of Ram, Sita, Bharat, Shatrughan and Lakshman are small in size, while that of Hanuman is large. The statue of Hanuman is kept in a glass casket in front of the five smaller statues. These idols are well-adorned, in colourful clothes. Shri Rama holds a bow, Bharat an umbrella and Lakshman and Shatrughan hold maces. The statue of Hanuman has a face like that of a boar and its feet are quite large. A closer look reveals that the feet in all the statues are turned inwards instead of outwards. They give the impression that they are statues depicting some form of animals.

It is possible that, like the idols, parts of the destroyed Jaina temple were scattered all over. There is a strong possibility that the black stone pillars and the image of *Varaha* had been lying unused before the construction of the mosque. Shah Juran Ghori's destruction of the Adinath temple of the Jainas is confirmed by the developments of 1861. In that year, the Jainas constructed a temple to commemorate the birthplace of Adinath on the *Shah Juran Tila*. The arrangement made for the control of the temple was peculiar to Ayodhya. The keys of the temple were in the possession of the descendant of Shah Juran Ghori. This was natural because the temple stood on his property. It was also settled that the proceeds from the offerings made in the temple were to be collected by the descendants of Ghori. There is a strong possibility that the black stone pillars might have been parts of the destroyed Jaina temples. We do know for a fact that Ayodhya was on the east-west and north-south trade route of India which connected Varanasi with Gaya. Several rich Jaina merchants resided in Ayodhya. We have instances of Jaina merchants from Ayodhya trading in Gaya in the eighth century AD.[37] There is a strong possibility that the black stone pillars were brought by these traders to Ayodhya from Gaya in the tenth or eleventh century to adorn the temples dedicated to the *tirthankaras*. The pillars from these

destroyed temples might have been used in the construction of the mosque.

Even if we grant that material from the previously destroyed temples was used in the construction of the Babri mosque, it is difficult to say, in the absence of any evidence, that the material was of the Ramjanambhoomi temple. There are inscriptions on the walls of the Babri Masjid that proclaim that the mosque was constructed under the orders of Babur.

The Babri Masjid has three inscriptions in Persian, two outside and one inside the mosque. The style of calligraphy in each of the three inscriptions is different. One of the two external inscriptions can hardly be read while only six lines of the other are legible. The legible inscription reads as couplets and apparently has been written in praise of God and the Prophet. In the first couplet God has been praised by saying that the creator of the universe does not need an abode. In the second stanza, the Prophet Muhammad has been called the ruler of the two worlds and the chief among the '*paigambars*' (prophets). The last legible lines are in praise of Babur, who has been called a *qalandar* (conqueror). Some interpret *qalandar* as saint or *faqir*. This inscription cannot be called significant.

The inscription inside the mosque is more important both for its content and for the position that it occupies. The tablet with the inscription is just above the pulpit. The content of the couplets were translated by A.S. Beveridge.[38] We reproduce her translation:

(*i*) *'By the order of the Emperor Babur whose justice is an edifice reaching up to the very heights of the heavens';*

(*ii*) *'The good hearted Mir Baqi built this alighting place of angels';*

(*iii*) *'May his goodness last forever!' [The year of the building was 935* AH *or 1529* AD*]*

It was on the basis of these inscriptions that Beveridge was ready to believe that Babur had ordered Mir Baqi to construct the mosque in Ayodhya. However, she deals with the inscriptions, not in the main body of the book, but in the appendices, where she expresses doubt by saying that, in his memoirs, Babur does not record the completion of the mosque.

بفرمودهٔ شاه بابر که عدلش
بنائیست تا کاخ گردوں ملاقی
بنا کرد ایں مهبط قدسیاں
امیر سعادت نشاں میر باقی
بود خیر باقی چو سال بنایش
عیاں شد که گفتم بود خیر باقی

Inscription above the pulpit inside the mosque

بنام آں که دانا هست اکبر
که خالق جمله عالم لامکانی
درود مصطفیٰ بعد از ستایش
که سرور انبیائ دوجهانی
خانه در جهاں بابر قلندر
که شد در دور گیتی کامرانی

Inscription at the entrance of the mosque

Beveridge inferred that '*Amir-i-Sadat-nishin Mir Baqi*' praises the glory of Mir Baqi, and that '*Sa'dat-nishin*' might not mean just 'good-hearted' but 'good fortune'. This, according to her, meant that it was the good fortune of Mir Baqi to be assigned the task of building a mosque on the site of an ancient Hindu temple. She adds, 'Presumably the order for building the mosque was given during Babur's stay in Aud (Ayodhya) in 934 AH at which time he would have been impressed by the dignity and sanctity of the ancient Hindu shrine.' She continued that Babur was an obedient follower of Muhammad and, as such, he was intolerant of another faith. He therefore regarded the substitution of a temple by a mosque as dutiful and worthy.[39] She goes on to add that she has no historical evidence to support her assumption of either Babur's destruction of the Hindu shrine or his construction of the mosque.

Beveridge interpreted the inscriptions literally. Her conclusions were based on preconceived notions. We are aware that Beveridge stayed in Faizabad/Ayodhya for two months when she was working on the *Babur-Nama*. She must surely have been influenced by the local myths. Earlier, in the appendices of the *Babur-Nama*, she expresses her doubts regarding the Persian document that claimed that Babur had spent several days in Ayodhya in AH 934. She wrote that she found the Persian document in the memoirs, page 420, and in Erskine's own codex of the *Waqiat-i-Babri*, folio 371, where however several circumstances isolate it from the context, one of them being that Babur did not march to Ghazipur in AH 934. She doubts its association with the text of Abdur Rahim and feels that it was probably a later addition that was made popular in 1826.[40] Erskine used this document and confirmed that Babur had been to and stayed in Ayodhya (1854). However, Beveridge seems to have been influenced by British writing on local affairs and she failed to raise any doubts regarding the inscriptions. However, she did add that there was no historical evidence to support the contentions made. It is the inscription inside the mosque that is most significant. Beveridge has translated the first line '*Bafarmuda-i-Shah Babur*' as 'By the order of the Emperor Babur'. The line could also mean 'By the desire of Emperor Babur'. Beveridge failed to observe that the inscription was in the form of a couplet and hence several shortcomings in the Persian language should

have been overlooked. It would be apt to add that in case the inscription wanted to convey 'By the order of Emperor Babur' then it should have been worded '*Ba hukm-i-Zehir-ed-din Mohammad Babar Ghazi*'.[41]

Given that no mention is available in the *Babur Nama*, it is possible that Mir Baqi, the viceroy of Babur in Ayodhya might have either constructed the mosque or taken over an old mosque and dedicated it to Babur, according to the traditions of the time. The tradition was an ancient one. It established that a conqueror by virtue of his victory in war became the lord of all land and the structures on it. As such, he could either destroy buildings that glorified the previous regime or construct a new structure to glorify his own reign. The geographical location of the mosque and the nature of Babur's conquest suggested that an existing mosque could have been repaired and re-dedicated to the emperor.

Babur's defeat of the Afghans was rather uncertain and unsettled. This is evident from the fact that, soon after his death in 1530, they again started consolidating themselves. Sher Shah defeated the Mughal emperor, Humayun, in this area. Sher Shah consolidated his position and in 1539/40 established a mint in the town. It was not till 1554 that the Mughals were able to subdue the area again and restore order.[42] Thus Mir Baqi must have known he could be uprooted at any time. The contentious mosque occupied a central, raised spot in the city and had come to be known as the 'Jami Masjid'. Mir Baqi might have had the mosque renovated and then re-dedicated to Babur. This is a strong possibility in the circumstances, but there is no historical evidence to support it.

The Muslim presence in Ayodhya had been established by 1194. In 1226, Avadh was made a province of the Delhi Sultanate and Malik Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, son of the third Mamluk Sultan of Delhi, Shams-ud-din Iltutmish, was appointed governor of Avadh. Ayodhya became the capital of the province and was fortified.[43] The importance of Ayodhya as a military cantonment, market-place and an administrative centre grew. The Sultans of Delhi realised the strategic importance of Ayodhya. They became aware that, through Ayodhya, they could control the eastern part of India, particularly Lakhnauti and Bengal. The Sultans also needed wealth and this could be realised from land revenue.

Agriculture was a major source of income and, as Avadh was rich in agriculture, its development as an administrative centre was natural. Being on the main commercial routes, Ayodhya developed as an important market. It is, therefore, certain that a Muslim population must have started growing in Ayodhya. It is on record that when Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq started adopting strict measures, a large number of nobles came and settled in Avadh.[44] When famine struck the Sultanate during the time of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, grain was sent in huge quantities to Sargadwari from Avadh.[45] Thus, by the beginning of the thirteenth century, Ayodhya had emerged as a town where important Muslim families and large number of Muslim soldiers lived. It was natural that the Muslim population needed a place to offer prayers. The 'Jami Masjid' was at the most central, convenient and high spot in the town. Seeing the geographical position of the Babri Masjid, we may say that there could not have been a more suitable place.[46]

The style of calligraphy in the inscriptions of the Babri Masjid also raises serious doubts about whether Babur constructed the mosque. The style in the inscription on the outside, just above the entrance of the mosque, is thick-set. This does not conform to the style of calligraphy prevalent in the sixteenth century but is more representative of the nineteenth century style of calligraphy.[47] The inscription in the inside of the mosque, just above the pulpit, though finer and sharper, is close-set. This style of calligraphy is again representative of the nineteenth century.[48] There is a strong possibility that the stone inscriptions were put up at a later stage to strengthen the claim that Babur had actually constructed the mosque.

We are aware that during Akbar's time the idea that Ayodhya was the birthplace of Shri Rama was revived. In fact, several places associated with Shri Rama started gaining significance. Tulsidas's '*Ramcharitmanas*' deified Rama. William Finch testifies the popularity of several places associated with Rama.[49] When Montgomery Martin came to Ayodhya in 1838, he actually saw the inscriptions of the Babri Masjid and also heard the local myth. It was during the nineteenth century that the Babri Masjid–Ram-janambhoomi controversy took root. It is possible, then, that some of the local Muslims put up the inscriptions to consolidate

their claims over the mosque. The choice of Babur as the maker of the mosque was natural and justified. They had to choose a Mughal emperor because of the attitude of the Nawabs of Avadh. When Saadat Khan became the governor of Avadh, he started making peace between the warring groups of the Vaishnava *Bairagis* and Shaiva *Sanyasis*. It was during this time that the *Bairagis* were able to take several religious spots in Ayodhya back from the *Sanyasis*. Several Rama sects began to grow after establishing their seat in Ayodhya. The second Nawab, Safdar Jang, shifted the capital from Ayodhya to Faizabad. Under Asaf-ud-daulah, the *Bairngis* received rich grants to extend their activities.

It is clear from the account of Montgomery Martin in 1838 that Faizabad came to be called a Muslim city, while Ayodhya was known to him as the Hindu city.[50] We also know from Mohammad Baksh that by 1819, the knowledge that Aurangzeb had levied a poll-tax on the Hindus and had destroyed some Hindu temples was common.[51] This made it dangerous to show that Aurangzeb had had the mosque constructed. The use of his name would have strengthened the contention of the destruction of the Ramjanam-bhoomi temple. It is possible that the local Sunni Muslims raised the bogey of Babur's name as they knew nothing about the memoirs of Babur. They must have been certain that the use of Babur's name would add respectability and strength to their claims over the mosque.

The style of architecture of the Babri Masjid raises doubts regarding the contention that Babur had the mosque constructed in 1528. The mosque is an ugly structure in the typical style of architecture of Jaunpur. In fact, the Babri Masjid if viewed from the west side (the back) appears identical to the Attala Masjid in Jaunpur. The Attala Masjid was constructed by the Sharqi Sultans. The upholders of the Ramjanambhoomi temple theory contend that as in Babur's mosque a wooden beam has been used just below the arch, it clearly shows that the mosque was constructed on the ruins of the temple. They do not realise that the use of a wooden beam to support the arch was typical of the buildings of the Sharqi Sultans of Jaunpur.[52] This was a natural phenomenon because most of the buildings of the Sharqis were constructed exclusively by Indian masons from indigenous resources.[53] Indian

masons who were far away from Delhi had not mastered the art of making a perfect arch.

The dome of the mosque also raises questions regarding the date of the construction of the building. By the sixteenth century, the art of making a symmetrical dome had been mastered.[54] In fact, the buildings of the sixteenth century no longer used beams to support arches, nor were their domes semi-circular. Some buildings from the fifteenth century have perfect arches and symmetrical domes. The Babri Masjid lacks the architectural finesse of the sixteenth century.

During the reign of Muhammad-bin-Tughlaq, the governor of Ayodhya was an enlightened person, Malik Amul-ul-Mulk Multani (1325–1351). In his time, several noble families settled in Avadh and it is certain that there was a great deal of construction. He is said to have built a palace on the banks of the Saryu, where its ruins still testify to the glorious past. It is probable that the fort of Ayodhya was constructed between 1228 and 1351.

The political history of Avadh indicates a period of growing political and economic significance for Ayodhya from 1325 to 1489. Building activity was also intense during this period. The Babri Masjid might have been constructed during the period of either the Tughlaqs or the Sharqis. This is clear from the fact that the bricks and masonry used in the construction of the walls of the fort closely resembles the bricks and masonry used in strengthening the mound of the Masjid on its western side. The period of the Sharqis (1226–1504) was comparatively prosperous for the zamindars and the local people, which encouraged prolific building activity.

The Babri Masjid has another incongruous feature. When the area of the mosque was divided in the nineteenth century, the eastern front was opened for the platform marking the birthplace of Rama and the eastern door was closed to the Muslims. The Muslims who came to offer *namaz* at the mosque entered from the north gate. The northern outer wall and the gate do not appear as old as the Babri Masjid. The outer wall on the northern side is well-plastered and has a striking emblem engraved at the top of the north gate. The emblem has two lions on either side with a peacock standing between them. The lions in a jumping position, with their tails curled. The lions-and-peacock emblem is found on

several buildings in Ayodhya. The other common emblem in Ayodhya is that of two fishes on either side above the main entrances of buildings. This is the emblem of the Nawabs of Avadh, whose sovereignty it attests. It is therefore probable that the outer wall on the north side with the emblem of the lions and peacock is a later addition.

The ugly building called the Babri Masjid is incongruous in the city. While the old walled city has several constructions that can be dated to the eighteenth century, the Babri Masjid is the only one that stands out as an ancient structure. There is another mosque near the Swargaddwar which is in ruins [see Plate 9]. It seems a construction of the later Mughal period. Scanty historical evidence does not allow us to date the construction of the Babri Masjid but architectural design does help us to conclude that the mosque belongs to a period before Babur. Historical evidence does not show that Babur came to Ayodhya and therefore the charge that he destroyed the Ramjanambhoomi temple does not arise. In fact, the contention that the Ramjanambhoomi temple was at the spot of the Babri Masjid is itself doubtful.

Notes and References

1. Ziya-ud-din A. Desai, *Indo-Islamic Architecture*, Delhi, 1970, pp. 1–2.
2. See Mehr Afshan Farooqui, 'Economic Policies of the Turkish Sultans of Delhi,' unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Allahabad, 1987.
3. Montgomery Martin, *Eastern India*, op. cit., p. 345.
4. Benet, *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, Calcutta, 1877, Vol. II, p. 461.
5. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. II, p. 171.
6. For a study of Babur, his career, life and achievements, the following authorities may be consulted:

A: Principal Sources

(*a*) The *Memoirs* of Babur. The Turki text was published by Ilmiski in 1957, and another (in facsimile from the Hyderabad Codex) by Beveridge in 1905. This latter is probably a direct copy from Babur's autograph text.

Of the Turki text there are two principal Persian versions; the first by Payanda Hasan, and the second associated with the name of Mirza Abd-ur-Rahim.

The best translations are three: (*a*) that of Erskine and Leyden, 1826

(based on the second Persian version, it is extremely good reading but not always faithful to its original); (*b*) the translation of Pavet De Courteille, 1871 (based upon Ilmiski's Turki text, it has remained for a long time the closest to the original); (*c*) the one based on Hyderabad Codex (by Mrs. A.S. Beveridge, 1921—to this, my obligations are great).

The *Babur-Nama*, does not supply all the details of Babur's life. There are four important 'blanks': the first for 1503–1504, the second for 1508–1519, the third for 1520–25; and the last for 1528. Recourse must therefore be taken to other authorities.

(*b*) The *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* of Mirza Haider Doghalat. The only translation is that of N. Elias and Denison Ross. The author was Babur's cousin, and in intimate contact with him during the Kabul period of his career. Mirza Haider's work is particularly valuable in filling the 'blanks' of the *Babur-Nama*; but as the author was a rigid Sunni, and a great hater of Shah Ismael and all his work, he is inclined to side with the Uzbegs in 1510 and later. Here, he is not to be trusted.

(*c*) The *Habib-us-Siyar* of Khawandamir. Lithographed editions were published at Bombay and Tehran. It is a universal history but Chapters 3 and 4 of Book III are particularly important for the relations between Babur and Shah Ismael. The author was a well-informed contemporary who visited Babur in India but preserved a detached attitude. The work was begun in AH 927 (AD 1549), and was perhaps continued down to AH 935 (AD 1557). Very little has been made of it, probably because it has never been translated. It was not known to Erskine.

(*d*) The *Ehsan-us-Siyar* of Mirza Barkhavardar Turkman. The only copy known is in the Library of Nawab Abdul Salam Khan of Rampur, which recounts in great detail the relations between Babur and Shah Ismael. The book was finished in AH 937. The history is noteworthy because the author, a Shia, wrote with the professed object of correcting the *Habib-us-Siyar*.

(*e*) The *Shaibani-Nama* of Mirza Mohammad Salih is the verified history of Babur's great antagonist. It has been edited and translated by A. Vambery. It is very important as it gives the Uzbeg side of the struggle between Babur and Shaibani.

(*f*) The *Alim-arai-Abassi* of Mirza Sikander Munshi is primarily a history of the Safawi King Shah Abbas (AD 1528–1628) and was compiled in 1616. But there is a detailed account of the Safawi dynasty, and of the relations between Babur and Shah Ismael.

(*g*) The *Humayun-Nama* of Gulbadan Begum, Babur's daughter contains some intimate and personal recollections of the author's father. The whole account, however, is exceedingly partial, and unreliable where it concerns the relations between Babur and his sons, which are represented as being the best possible. It has been excellently edited by Mrs. A. Beveridge.

B: Minor Sources

(*h*) The *Tarikh-i-Hakki* of Shaikh Abd-al-Hakk bin Saif-ud-din Dihlawi is

useful for the Lodi period. What the author reports of the time of Bahlol and his successors, he reports as an eye-witness or from hearsay.

(*i*) The *Ahsan-ut-Twarikh* of Hasan is a chronicle of the reigns of Shah Ismael and Shah Tahmsap from AH 900–985 (AD 1522–1607). There is however an unfortunate lacuna (AH 913–931—AD 1535–1553) in the texts I have seen, which deprive the book of much of its value as a source for Babur's history.

(*j*) The *Twarikh-i-Firishta* of Muhammad-bin-Kasim is useful for filling the gaps in the *Babur-Nama*. The account of Babur is, like the rest of the book, sane, accurate and well-balanced. The most accessible is the Calcutta reprint of Briggs's translation, but it is not faithful throughout.

(*k*) The *Tabqat-i-Akbari* of Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad is a good general history of India from the time of Muhammedan invasions to the latter part of the sixteenth century.There is a short but a good account of Babur.

(*l*) The *Akbar-Nama* of Abu'l Fazl contains an introductory chapter dealing with Babur, based principally upon the *Babur-Nama*, but too laudatory to be trusted. It has been translated by H. Beveridge.

C: Modern Works

(*m*) Erskine, *A History of India in the Time of Babur and Humayun*, London, 1854, is a fine and scholarly piece of work, excellent alike from the Persian and Indian point of view. Its solid learning and sound judgement will always make it difficult to supersede. But the author did not make use of some important sources.

(*n*) Lane Poole, *Baber* (*Rulers of India*) London, 1918. The author has relied on Pavet de Corteille's translation.

(*o*) Caldecoft, *Life of Baber.*

(*p*) John Leyden, *Memoirs of Zehir-ed-din Muhammed Baber, Emperor of Hindustan*, London, 1819.

(*q*) A.S. Beveridge,trans., *Babur-Nama*, 1921.

(*r*) L.F. Rushbrook Williams, *An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1918.

7. L.F. Rushbrook Williams, *An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1918, p. iii.
8. Radhey Shyam Shukla, *Shri Ram Janambhoomi* (Sachitra Pramanik Itihas), Ayodhya, 1986. This story was also given by Cunningham in *Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. I, p. 329.
9. Shukla, ibid., p. 13.
10. Ibid. The earliest written record of this story can be seen in the work compiled by Montgomery Martin in 1838, p. 333.
11. John Leyden, *Memoirs of Zehir-ed-din Muhammed Baber, Emperor of Hindustan*, London, 1819, p. ix.
12. Montgomery Martin, op. cit., p. 334.
13. H.M. Elliot, *History of India As Told by its own Historians: the Muhammadan Period*, Calcutta, 1872, Vol. IV, p.273.

14. P. Carnegy, *Historical Sketch of Fyzabad Tahsil including the Former Capitals of Ajodhya and Fyzabad*, Lucknow,1870.
15. Report of Cunningham in *JASB*, 1865, p. 245.
16. A. Fuhrer, *Report of the Archaeological Survey of India,* (New Series), 1891, Vol. II, p. 297.
17. A.S. Beveridge, trans., *Babur-Nama*, London, 1921, p. 602.
18. Leyden, op. cit., p. 26.
19. Mahdi Hasan, trans. with commentary, *The Rahela of Ibn Batuta*, Baroda, 1976, p. 105.
20. Beveridge, op. cit., p. 602.
21. Ibid. (footnote).
22. Abdur Rahman Chisti in *Mirat-i-Masudi*, 1682, and Ibn Batuta in the *Rahela* refer to the territory between the rivers Gomti and Ghagra as Avadh.
23. Beveridge, op. cit., p. 680.
24. Ibid. She found it in the *Babur-Nama*, p. 420, and in Erskine's own codex of the *Waqiat-i-Babri*, p. 371.
25. Ibid. She concludes by writing, 'where however several circumstances isolate it from the context', p. 678.
26. Ibid., p. 678; f 376(b), May 25: 'A great storm came and some pages flew away.'
27. W.W. Hunter ed., *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol.III, London, 1881, p. 232.
28. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. I, p. 32.
29. Montgomery Martin, op. cit., p. 334.
30. P. Carnegy, *Historical Sketch of Fyzabad Tahsil, including the Former Capitals of Ajodhya and Fyzabad*, Lucknow,1870.
31. Nevill, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: District Fyzabad*, 1905, p. 150. See also Benet,*Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, 1877, Vol. II, p. 459.
32. Benet, ibid., Vol. II, p. 459.
33. Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, Holland, 1987, p. 11.
34. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 459.
35. Benet, *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, 1877, Vol. II, p. 8.
36. See *Ramjanambhoomi*, a booklet issued by the Kale Ram Mandir Trust in Ayodhya.
37. Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, op. cit., p. 138.
38. A.S. Beveridge, trans., op. cit., Appendix, p. 688.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. S.R. Faruqi, a noted Urdu critic and Persian scholar, feels that in case the inscription is to be interpreted in the literal sense, as Beveridge wants to do, then it should have been worded, 'By the order of Emperor Babur' and should have read as, '*Ba hukm-i-Zehir-ed-din Mohammad Babur Ghazi*' in Persian. In discussion with the author, July 1987.
42. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. I, p. 444.
43. Elliot's *History of India as Told by Her Historians*, Vol. II, p. 331.

44. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 246–48.
45. Ibid.
46. See Cunningham's report published in *JASB*, 1865, pp. 203–16. It can be seen that wherever the rule of the Sultans was established, a 'Jami Masjid' was raised. In Kanauj, the Sharqis also constructed a Jami Masjid.
47. S.R. Faruqui, feels that the style of calligraphy is representative of the nineteenth century. In discussion with the author, July 1987.
48. Ibid.
49. William Foster ed., *Early Travels in India*, London, 1921, p. 176.
50. Montgomery Martin, op. cit., p. 333.
51. W. Hoey, *Memoirs of Delhi and Faizabad*, Allahabad, 1888, pp. 151–53.
52. See Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture*, 2 Volumes, London, 1923. In the Introduction to Volume III, of the *Report of the Archaeological Survey of India* 1871–72, the style of architecture is discussed in detail. It says of the buildings of the Sharqi Sultans of Jaunpur:

> The style of buildings adopted by the Muhammadan kings of Jaunpur seems to be formed by a fusion of those of the Ghori Pathans and Khilji Pathans of Delhi .... The finest example of this style is the Atala Masjid of Ibrahim Sharqi at Jaunpur, and the largest is the great Jami Masjid of Husen Sharqi at Jaunpur. Other examples are the Arhai Kangra Masjid at Benares, the Jami Masjids at Etawah and Kanauj, and the Lal Darwaza and Zamgiri Masjids at Jaunpur.
>
> Although the power of the Sharqi kings lasted rather less than a century, yet the richness and extent of the country over which they ruled, from Kanauj to Bihar and from Bahraich to Kalpi, yielded them greater wealth than the united revenues of the Princes of Bengal and Delhi, and this enabled them to erect many stately and magnificent masjids, which are almost the only existing monuments of Muhammadan rule in upper India during the fifteenth century. The masjids of the Sharqi kings of Jaunpur thus fill a very important gap in the history of Pathan Architecture of Northern India, between the last building of the Tughlaqs and the earliest specimen of the Afgans. They are the latest examples in which the lofty front arch, towering high above the main dome, forms the principal point of the building. (Pp. 11–12)

See also Ziya-ud-din Desai, *Indo-Islamic Architecture*, Delhi, 1970, pp. 27-28.

53. Desai, ibid., pp. 48–49.
54. Cunningham, *Report of the Archaeological Survey of India*, Vol. III, 1871-72, p. 12.

Chapter Six

The Location of the Ramjanambhoomi Temple

The Babri Masjid occupies the most prominent spot in the old city of Ayodhya. It is situated on raised ground and is surrounded on all sides by Hindu temples. It is more than obvious that it is the geographical location of the mosque that has forced it into controversies. Hindus have been claiming for a long time that the site is the spot where Rama, the *avatar* of Vishnu, took human form. Muslims claim it was constructed by the first Mughal emperor, Babur. They believe it is a place dedicated to the faith by Babur and therefore has the sanction of the conqueror.

Yet neither Hindus nor Muslims have raised claims over the two mosques that have been in ruins for a long time, and which are situated very near the Babri Masjid. The local traditions say the two mosques in ruins were raised, like the Babri Masjid, after destroying Hindu temples. The story is

> *... that at the time of Muhammadan conquest there were three important Hindu shrines, with but few devotees attached at Ayodhya, which was then little other than wilderness. These were the 'Janamasthan', the 'Swargaddwar Mandir' also known as the 'Ram Darbar', and 'Treta-ke-Thakur'. On the first of these the Emperor Babur built the mosque, which still bears his name, in* AD *1528. On the second, Aurangzeb did the same (*AD *1658 to 1707); and on the third, that sovereign or his predecessors built a mosque, according to the well-known principle of enforcing their religion on all those whom they conquered.*[1]

The places where the mosques are alleged to have been raised marked very important places connected with the life of Rama. The 'Janamasthan' marked the place where Rama was born. The 'Swargaddwar' was the gate through which he passed into paradise (it was possibly also the spot where his body was consigned to the fire). The 'Treta-ke-Thakur' was known as the place where he performed a great sacrifice, and which he commemorated by setting up images of himself and Sita.

Both communities have raised no claims over the two mosques said to have been constructed by Aurangzeb, popularly known in the area as Naurang Shah's Masjids [see Plates 6 & 9]. Instead, Hindus and Muslims have chosen to contest the mosque said to have been constructed by Babur. It is amazing that the Hindus have raised no claims over Naurang Shah's Masjid situated at the place which is known as 'Treta-ke-Thakur'. There is some historical evidence available which supports the contention that, either at the site of the mosque or near it, a Hindu temple once existed. It is said that a fragmentary inscription was found in the ruins around the 'Treta-ke-Thakur'. The inscription indicated that, in 1241, Raja Jaichandra of Kanauj raised a temple to Vishnu.[2] It is probable that Hindus and Muslims have raised no claims over the other two mosques because they have been in ruins for a very long time.[3] Benet writes:

> *The two other old mosques to which allusion has been made (known by the common people by the name of Naurang Shah, by whom they meant Aurangzeb) are now mere picturesque ruins. Nothing has been done by the Hindus to restore the old mandir of 'Ram Darbar'. The 'Treta-ke-Thakur' was reproduced near the old ruin by the Raja of Kulu, whose estate is said to be in the Punjab, more than two centuries ago, and it was improved upon afterwards by Aholya Bai, Marathin, who also built the adjoining ghat* (AD 1784). *She was the widow of Jaswant Rao Holkar of Indore, from which family Rs. 231 are still received at this shrine.*[4]

Because of the faith in the sanctity of that very site, the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi has definitely become the most important place for the Hindus. The local myth of the Hindus is that,

after Rama and his successors, Ayodhya declined and the city was soon covered by a thick forest. The several palaces in and around the Ramkot were reduced to ruins. It was at some later stage that the city of Ayodhya and the several places associated with the life of Shri Rama Chandra were discovered and re-established by Bikramjeet. British historians contended that Bikramjeet was the local form of Vikramaditya and thus dated him to the 4th century AD.[5] It is said that once, while on a military campaign, Bikramjeet came and rested on the banks of the river Saryu (some people say that Bikramjeet was on a hunting expedition). When he was asleep he saw a fantastic apparition—a glorious human form on horseback. He spoke to the apparition, who said it was the god Prayag, come to Ayodhya to wash off his sins in the river Saryu. The apparition said people come to Prayag (modern Allahabad) to wash off their sins in the holy *Sangam* (confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna), which becomes heavy with the weight of the sins. The apparition said that he had, therefore, come to Saryu to cleanse himself of his sins. Prayag then asked Bikramjeet to undertake the holy task of re-establishing the several places of worship of Rama in Ayodhya. When Bikramjeet asked him how he would find the holy places, he was told to find the birthplace and, from it, other places of worship could be traced. He was told that the birthplace of Rama could be spotted with the help of the 'Mata Gajendra', a cow. The apparition said that he must walk around with the cow and wherever the cow halted and milk started flowing incessantly from its udders, was the birthplace of Rama. Bikramjeet found the Ramjanambhoomi in this way and constructed a temple with eighty-four pillars of black-stone to commemorate the birthplace of Rama. It is held that Bikramjeet took help from some very ancient texts and restored 360 places of worship in Ayodhya.[6] It is further contended that Babur destroyed the eighty-four-*kasauti*-pillar temple and raised a mosque there, on the instigation of a local Muslim saint called Musa Aashikan. Some hold that another saint called Jalal Shah was also involved in the conspiracy to destroy the Ramjanambhoomi temple.[7]

As we have seen, historical evidence not only does not support the local myths, it completely controverts it. Archaeological excavations conducted separately by A.K. Narayan and B.B. Lal

indicated no settlement in Ayodhya during the Gupta period i.e., the fourth to the sixth centuries AD.[8] Again, it is difficult to hold that 360 places of worship associated with the life of Shri Rama Chandra were established because we are not certain if present-day Ayodhya can be identified exactly with the epic city Ayodhya.[9] However, we could for argument's sake accept the faith that has developed for centuries that today's Ayodhya is the same as the Ayodhya described in Valmiki's *Ramayana*. The same cannot be said with regard to the place commemorating the birthplace of Shri Rama. It has become extremely important for us to attempt to identify the place of birth of Rama according to the old beliefs. (In this attempt, we are concerned with neither the historicity of Rama nor with the idea that Rama was an incarnation of Vishnu).

We have a number of treatises that accept that Rama was born and brought up in Ayodhya. As a result, the whole city of Ayodhya came to be called 'Ramjanambhoomi'. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsha*, the Buddhist and Jaina texts and Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* have said Ayodhya was the city where Vishnu was re-incarnated. The *Ain-i-Akbari* and the *Akbar-Nama* both call Ayodhya, *Ramjanambhoomi*. But the temple commemorating the birthplace of the *avatar* of Vishnu does not find mention in any of these works, or in the descriptions of some travellers to Ayodhya. This leads us to reason that either there was no temple constructed by Vikramaditya to commemorate the birthplace of Shri Rama or, if there was such a temple, it was never regarded as important or sacred. The former conclusion is more likely as any temple that commemorated the birthplace of Rama was bound to be extremely famous.

It is clear from the several literary sources up to the end of the eighteenth century that a temple commemorating the birthplace of Shri Rama was unknown. European visitors were the first to recount the myth about a mosque that had been constructed on the spot of the famous Ramjanambhoomi temple. The first account is in 1838. William Finch tells us about the palace and the fort; he also describes a ruined fort, which the local people call the palace of Rama. He adds that it is popularly held that Rama assumed human form in the city. He relates a myth regarding a cave from where Shri Rama was said to have left for heaven. However, he

does not make reference to the Ramjanambhoomi temple.[60] In 1838 we have the account of Montgomery Martin who says that local stories relate that a Ramjanambhoomi temple had been destroyed by Babur and a mosque constructed on its spot.[11] However, he doubts the stories in circulation.

These two observations by European visitors clearly indicate that the significance of Bikramjeet's Ramjanambhoomi temple was unknown in 1608–11 but, by 1838, local people had started asserting that Babur's mosque had been raised by destroying the famous Ramjanambhoomi temple. This leads us to presume that the local myth accusing Babur of destroying the temple developed early in the nineteenth century. We must remember that Mohammed Baksh, who completed his *Memoirs of Fyzabad* in 1819 does not mention either the Babri Masjid or the Rama temple.[12] Again, it was in 1819 that Leyden translated the memoirs of Babur in English and suggested that Babur had gone to Ayodhya.[13] In 1826 Erskine, another historian and translator of Babur's memoirs, contended that he had found a document that showed that Babur had stayed in Ayodhya for more than ten days.[14] It is not surprising that the local story of Babur's destruction of the temple became accepted by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Despite all the inadequacies in the historical evidence of the existence of a Ramjanambhoomi temple, we shall attempt to identify the place of birth of Rama, since we accept, on the basis of faith, that the present-day Ayodhya is the Ayodhya of Valmiki's *Ramayana*. In today's Ayodhya, there are several temples that claim to commemorate the birth of Rama. An attempt was made in 1902 to trace the birthplace, but the committee that took the task upon itself marked two places for the birth of Rama Chandra. They called one place the 'Janambhoomi' and the other the 'Janamasthan'.

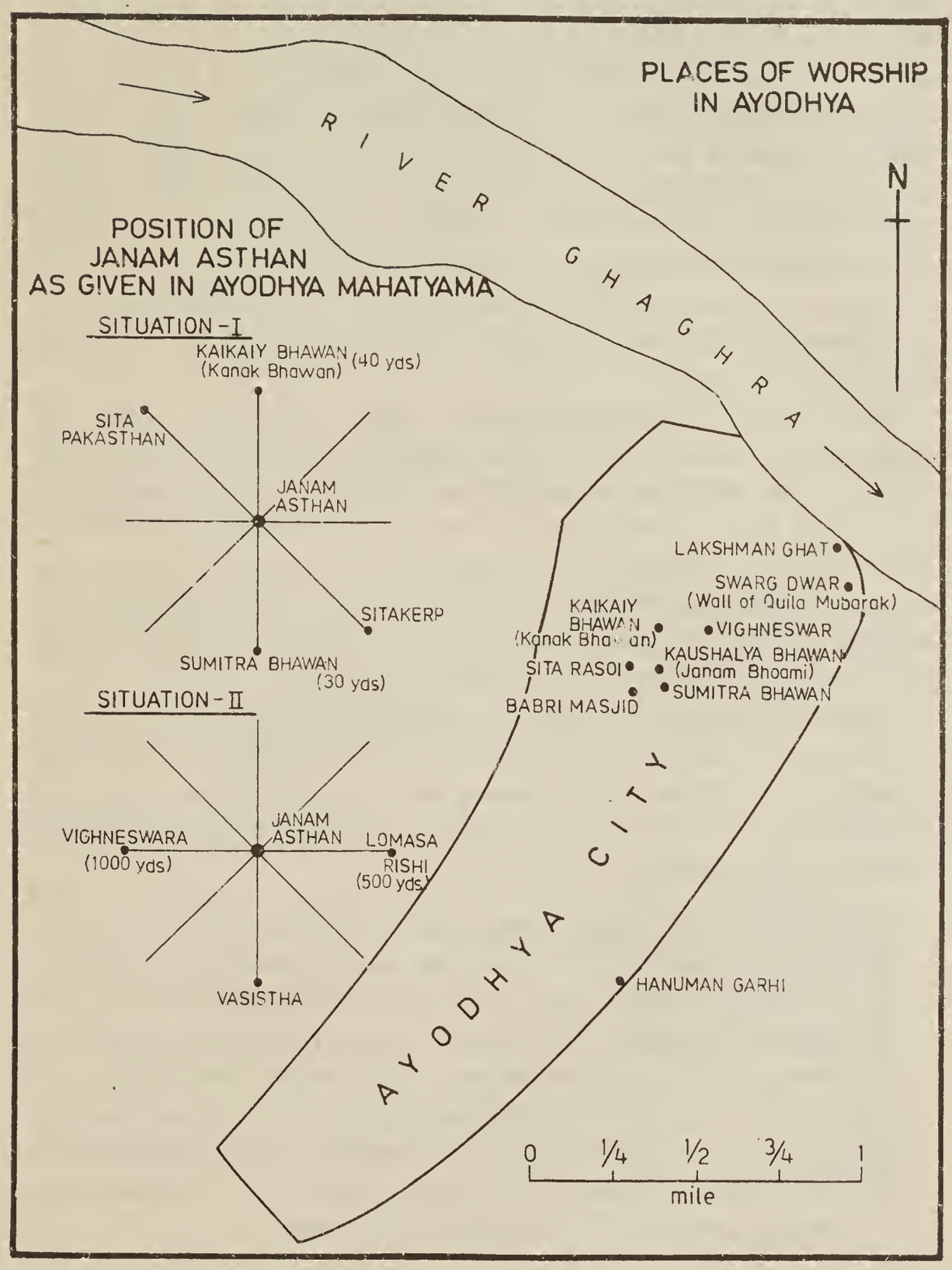
Several attempts have been made to describe and locate places of worship in Ayodhya. After the sixteenth century, a tradition had developed in North India of providing guide-books for pilgrims. These guide-books were known as *mahatmya* and the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* was a part of this effort. Today, a few *Ayodhya Mahatmyas* are sold in local bookstalls. They have been compiled in Hindi and have no authenticity. Up to now, thirty-six manuscripts

of the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* are known. All the *mahatmyas* claim they have been taken from the *Skandpuran*, the *Brahmanadapuran*, the *Padmapuran* and the *Rudrayamala*.

We have used the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* or 'Pilgrimage to Ayodhya', the English translation by Ram Narayan, as our basic guide.[15] We have used this particular *mahatmya* because it is one of the oldest manuscripts available. The rest of the *mahatmyas* can be dated to after the beginning of the nineteenth century. Also, this was the guide-book used in 1902 to mark the several places of worship in Ayodhya.[16] The local committee, consisting of the citizens of Ayodhya, was entrusted with the task of putting stone-marks before all the religious places of Ayodhya. It was allocated the money that had been collected to organise the visit of the Prince of Wales. As the Prince cancelled his visit to Faizabad, the District Magistrate decided to utilise the amount in this way. The District Magistrate, on the demand of the members of the committee, appointed Mahant Ram Manohar Parshad of the Bara Asthan as the Chairman of the committee. This committee put the mark, '*No. 1, Ramjanambhoomi*', in front of the eastern entrance of the Babri Masjid. The committee claimed that according to the *Ayodhya Mahatmya*, this was the birthplace of Shri Rama. Yet the same committee also erected the stone-mark, '*No. 5, Janamasthan*'. It is unknown how they distinguished the 'Ramjanambhoomi' from the 'Janamasthan'. The *Ayodhya Mahatmya* does not distinguish between them. It observes:

> *Afterwards he [the pilgrim] should go to the Janambhoomi. East of Vighneshvara, or north of the residence of Vasistha, or west of that of Bomasa Rishi, is the Janamasthan, the giver of salvation, the mere sight of which releases a man from returning to a woman's womb.*[17]

The motive of the citizens' committee in putting up stone-mark '*No. 1, Ramjanambhoomi*' at the entrance of the Babri Masjid is not beyond suspicion. It seems the committee was adamant to claim the contentious mosque as a Hindu place of worship. It is clear from the *Mahatmya* that the actual place of Shri Rama Chandra's birth was believed to be Kaushalya Bhavan. Again, it would be wrong to assume that the first stone-mark was put before


PLACES OF WORSHIP
IN AYODHYA
N
RIVER GHAGHRA
POSITION OF
JANAM ASTHAN
AS GIVEN IN AYODHYA MAHATYAMA
SITUATION - I
KAIKAIY BHAWAN (40 yds)
(Kanak Bhawan)
SITA
PAKASTHAN
JANAM
ASTHAN
SITAKERP
SUMITRA BHAWAN
(30 yds)
SITUATION - II
VIGHNESWARA
(1000 yds)
JANAM
ASTHAN
LOMASA
RISHI
(500 yds)
VASISTHA
LAKSHMAN GHAT
SWARG DWAR
(Wall of Quila Mubarak)
KAIKAIY
BHAWAN
(Kanak Bhawan)
VIGHNESWAR
KAUSHALYA BHAWAN
(Janam Bhoomi)
SITA RASOI
SUMITRA BHAWAN
BABRI MASJID
AYODHYA CITY
HANUMAN GARHI
0
1/4
1/2
3/4
1
mile

the Babri Masjid because it was convenient to trace the other places of worship in Ayodhya from here. In fact, it would be more correct to say, on the basis of the *Mahatmya*, that the Ramjanambhoomi can be located by locating the other places of worship. The committee had apparently tried to make a distinction between the 'Ramjanambhoomi' and the 'Janamasthan' and therefore in front of the Kaushalya Bhavan they had erected the stone-mark '*No. 5, Janamasthan*'. The marking of two places as the birthplace of Shri Rama can be explained by the confusion prevailing in Ayodhya. Faith in the local traditions made the members put stone-mark *No. 1* before the Babri Masjid, but according to the location given in the *Mahatmya* they were forced to put stone-mark *No. 5* before Kaushalya Bhavan.

The *Ayodhya Mahatmya*, like the other *mahatmyas*, gives the geographical location of various religious places and provides details of the religious myths and the significance of these places. It is in the form of *sholakas* and reads like a religious discourse. The *Ayodhya Mahatmya* is presented in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati, where the latter asks questions. It is divided into thirty chapters and, in the concluding chapter, it says that whoever reads or hears it is bound to go to heaven.

The book opens by telling us about the origin of the city of Ayodhya. The myth related is that Brahma requested Vishnu to provide land to Manu, and 'Vishnu with much pleasure, bestowed on him, in the centre of the earth this wonderful and splendid Ayodhya'. It continues:

> *Brahma then came to our mortal world with Manu, and Visnu sent Vasistha and Visvakarma with an order that the latter was to build a city as the former might desire. The site was accordingly selected, but the ground being found unfit for such a purpose, the Sudarshanchakra was formed and the foundation was laid. Various kinds of shrines, palaces, roads, markets, gardens decorated with jewels, trees bearing beautiful fruits and flowers, birds with melodious voices, innumerable elephants, horses, chariots, bullocks, cows and all sorts of virtuous men and women provided with everything were created.*

The geographical limits of the city were marked by Guptar in the north-west and the Lakshmanadhara in the east. According to this

Mahatmya, the city of Ayodhya was located between the river Saryu running from west to east and the river Tons which was in the south.

The *Mahatmya* then goes on to relate the benefits that can be drawn by going on a pilgrimage to Ayodhya. It also gives us the location of the several places of worship. It describes the several bathing *ghats* on the river Saryu and relates the religious myths that are closely associated with the *ghats*. It relates the position of the various security guards along the enclosure of the Ramkot. It gives us an account of the greatness of the guards. Thus, we are able to trace the enclosure of the fort of Rama.

Several palaces are situated in the fort and, from them, we are told about the position of the birthplace of the sons of king Dasharatha. The *Mahatmya* states specifically that the royal princes, the incarnations of the celestial bodies, were born in the respective chambers of their mothers. In Chapter X of the *Mahatmya*, it is said that

> *Sita rasoi [the kitchen of Sita] is situated north-west of the Birthplace. Forty yards north of the Birthplace is the house of Kaikeyi, where Bharata was born. Sixty yards south of it is the dwelling of Sumitra, where Lakshmana and Satrughana were born. South-east of the Birthplace is the Sita Kup, which is also called 'Jnana-kup'.*[18]

The directions and distances that have been given clearly mark out Kaushalya Bhavan as the birthplace of Rama. The location of the Babri Masjid is entirely different. The Sita-rasoi is situated north of the mosque but Kaushalya Bhavan is located south-east of the Sita-rasoi (i.e., Sita-rasoi is north-west of the Kaushalya Bhavan). Again, Kaikeyi Bhavan is said to be located forty yards north of the Janamasthan. Today, in Ayodhya, the Kaikeyi Bhavan [see Plate 7] (known as the Kanak Bhavan) is positioned more than forty yards north of Kaushalya Bhavan. Kanak Bhavan is situated less than about one hundred yards north-east of the disputed mosque.

Kanak Bhavan, Kaikeyi Bhavan, and Kaikeyi-kop Bhavan must not be confused with each other. Some people tend to mistake the Kaikeyi-kop Bhavan for Kaikeyi Bhavan. Today, the Kaikeyi-kop

Bhavan is situated across the road and right opposite Kaushalya Bhavan. Thus, Kaikeyi-kop Bhavan is situated north of Kaushalya Bhavan and north-east of the Babri Masjid. It is said by the local people that when Kaikeyi was angry with Dasharatha, she took to the Kop Bhavan. It is surprising that, in the *Mahatmya*, we have no mention of the Kaikeyi-kop Bhavan. Valmiki's *Ramayana* relates that after Rama's marriage, the palace of Kaikeyi was gifted to Sita and thus came to be known as the palace of Sita. We must remember that Kaikeyi belonged to a powerful royal family. She is also said to have been Dasharatha's favourite wife. Her's was the best palace in the kingdom. Valmiki's *Ramayana* relates further that Kaikeyi loved Rama more than her son Bharata and was extremely.overjoyed at the marriage of Rama with Sita. The custom still prevalent is that when the bride is brought home by the bridegroom, the women family members by turn look at the bride's face. The ceremony is called *muh-dikhayi*. The in-laws of the bride give her gifts as they lift her veil. Kaikeyi, on this occasion, gifted her beautiful palace to Sita and shifted out to a place very near the living quarters of King Dasharatha.

The coordinates of the location of the Ramjanambhoomi in the *Mahatmya* also say that Sumitra Bhavan was sixty yards south of the Birthplace. Sumitra was the youngest queen of Dasharatha and did not belong to a very prominent family. She was therefore provided a shabby palace in comparison to Kaushalya and Kaikeyi. Today, Sumitra Bhavan stands less than sixty yards south of Kaushalya Bhavan, but it is just twenty yards from the Babri Masjid, in the south-east. The '*Mahatmya*' says Sita-kup was in the south-east of the Birthplace. Today's location actually shows Sita-kup south-east of Kaushalya Bhavan but east of the Babri Masjid.

The *Ayodhya Mahatmya* gives us another set of directions for locating the birthplace of Rama. In Chapter VII, it is pointed out, 'Afterwards he [the pilgrim] should go to the Janambhoomi. East of Vighneshvara or north of the residence of Vashistha, or west of Bomasa Rishi, is the Janamasthan ... .'[19] In this set of directions, no distance is given, which makes them more difficult. The contemporary position of the religious places mentioned by the *Mahatmya* once again indicate that the birthplace was situated at the position of Kaushalya Bhavan.

The abode of Vighneshvara was located by stone-mark Number 35. The mark is erected on an uncultivated patch of agricultural land (we were told by the local people that the ownership of the field was being contested in the civil court). The Babri Masjid is located south-west of the mark and Kaushalya Bhavan, too, is to the south-west of it, although the Babri Masjid was more to the west than Kaushalya Bhavan. As the position of the abode of Vighneshvara is uncertain, we tried to locate it from the internal evidence of the *Mahatmya*. In Chapter VI of the *Ayodhya Mahatmya*, the position of the various celestial sentinels around the boundary of the Ramkot is stated as follows:

> *... at the western door of the fort resides Dudhvakaa. Here [Mahadeva says] I, too, am known by the name of 'Durgesvara'. Near this live Sut Bul, a little further—Gandha-madana, Kikshuba, Surubha and Purus. At the northern gate lives Bibhishana, and east of him Surma, whose wife is respected by all; she protects the virtuous and punishes the vicious. To the east of her is the residence of Vighneshvara, whose sight removes all obstacles that are in the way of men. East of him is the abode of Pindaruk-vira, who defends Ayodhya and chastises the wicked. East of him is the abode of Vira Matta-gajendra, the bestower of happiness, and a short distance from it is the pond, bathing in which leads a man to perfection.*[20]

According to the coordinates, the abode of Vighneshvara is situated to the west of the temple of Mata-gajendra and east of the abode of Bibhishana.

In present-day Ayodhya, the temple of Mata-gajendra is located to the north-east of Kanak Bhavan. To the west of the Mata-gajendra temple, we found a half-buried stone-mark which indicated the abode of Pindaruk-vira. To the west of Pindaruk-vira, was stone-mark No. 35, which indicated the abode of Vighneshvara. Further west, we found stone-mark No. 34, reading 'The Abode of Surma and his wife'. The abode of Surma is situated north of Kanak Bhavan. However, the present position of Vighneshvara does not tally with the directions given in the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* with reference to either Kaushalya Bhavan or the Babri Masjid. The abode of Vighneshvara is to the north-east of Kaushalya

Bhavan and further north-east of the Babri Masjid. However, the directions to the Ramjanambhoomi from the other places agreed very closely with the position of the Kaushalya Bhavan. Today, the abode of Bomasa Rishi has been identified with the Lomash Ashram. The place is very close to the ancient *Ram Gulela Mandir*. From the abode of Bomasa Rishi, the Kaushalya Bhavan is exactly to the west, at a distance of about 200 to 250 yards. The Babri Masjid is also west of the abode of Bomasa Rishi, but a bit towards the south. The distance of the Babri Masjid from the abode of Bomasa Rishi is between 250 and 300 yards. The *Ayodhya Mahatmya* states that the residence of Vashistha has the Janamasthan to its north. Today, we have the residence of Vashistha to the south of the Babri Masjid and Kaushalya Bhavan. Thus, the directions are given in Chapter VII to locate the Janamasthan tally only in a limited manner with the location of Kaushalya Bhavan. The Babri Masjid is neither exactly east of Vighneshvara, nor exactly north of Vashistha nor exactly west of Bomasa Rishi. Kaushalya Bhavan is also neither exactly east of Vighneshvara nor exactly north of Vashistha. However, in case we compare the position of the Babri Masjid and Kaushalya Bhavan as they stand today, in relation to the places marked by the *Mahatmya* for locating the Janamasthan, we find Kaushalya Bhavan more in agreement with the directions than the Babri Masjid. Kaushalya Bhavan is less to the west of Vighneshvara than the Babri Masjid. Again, Kaushalya Bhavan is exactly west of the abode of Bomasa Rishi. This forces us to assume that, according to the directions, given in Chapter VII to locate the Janamasthan, Kaushalya Bhavan is nearer the Janambhoomi than the Babri Masjid is.

The location of the Janamasthan as given by the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* clearly indicates Kaushalya Bhavan to be the actual place of birth of Rama. It is peculiar that after it was assumed and believed for a long time that Kaushalya Bhavan was the very place where it is today, the claim was made that Shri Rama was born at the site where the Babri Masjid stands today. It is surprising that it should be assumed that Rama, the eldest son of King Dasharatha should have been born some distance away from the chamber of his mother. Valmiki's *Ramayana* states that King Dasharatha was blessed with sons after a long time. It was natural for Dasharatha

to take all precautions for a safe delivery and there is no probability that he would agree to move Kaushalya some distance away from her chamber. Again, all the other children of Dasharatha were born in the chambers of their mothers. We may, therefore, assume that like Bharat, Lakshman and Shatrughana, Rama was also born in his mother's chamber.

It is surprising that Bikramjeet chose to restore 360 temples Elliot tries to give us an answer on the basis of Hindu philosophy but is not convincing. The protagonists of this theory also hold that Bikramjeet constructed 84 pillars in raising a temple, though this has not been explained either.

Unlike the myth of the restoration of 360 temples in Ayodhya by Bikramjeet, the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* only gives us an account of 131 places of worship. With the exception of a few, all the places are located in the old city of Ayodhya. Places of worship situated in the old city of Ayodhya are enclosed within the walls of the fort. As the palace of the Raja of Ayodhya is outside the city, it is clear that all the land enclosed within the old fort constituted *nazul* (government-owned) land. It is therefore natural that all the temples, other places of worship and different abodes situated within the old fort must have been raised with the permission of the government. The District Gazetteer of Faizabad clearly indicates that lease on *nazul* land had been granted by the government to religious organisations and other people.[21] Cunningham told us in 1862–1863 that, with the exception of the Babri Masjid and the walls of the fort, all the buildings including the temples were apparently constructions of the period either during or after the reign of Aurangzeb.[22]

Cunningham was convinced that the temples in Ayodhya were not ancient constructions. He seems to observe the walls of the Ramkot in ruins. Today, there is a high wall enclosing the old city of Ayodhya. The wall in the east has several gates on which the symbol of the Nawabs of Avadh is clearly visible. It seems that the eastern wall had been repaired and re-plastered several times in the past. It is the remnants of the wall along the river that are intriguing. Parts of the wall, which was like an embankment, can be seen in the north and west of the city. Now that the wall is in ruins, several layers of different constructions can be seen. In

some places, the brick wall in ruins shows the use of baked clay in building the wall [see Plate 5]. The baked earthen clay is placed in the typical deep-well fashion and thus dates the wall to between the fifth and the second centuries BC. We could presume that the clay wall marked the boundary of the old city. The wall that has been superimposed over the earthen clay, still appears to be a strong structure and we can still see that different kinds of stone and brick have been put together with mortar. Thus, in some places, it matches entirely with the construction of the fort after the thirteenth century AD. It would be pertinent to point out that at some places in the wall we find the same stones (13′ × 19′) and mortar that have been used in the construction of the Babri Masjid. It is therefore a natural assumption that the Babri Masjid was contemporaneous to the wall.

Historical evidence indicates that Ayodhya had started emerging as an administrative and military centre from the twelfth century AD and it is likely that Muslim settlement during this period must have intensified. It was natural that, along with the army, several other officers of the state must have made Ayodhya their home. They must have raised a mosque to offer prayers. The central spot provided them the best location and as the place was situated at a height the mosque naturally came to be called the Jami Masjid. It would be wrong to assume that it was raised after destroying a famous Hindu temple.

Historical and religious evidence that is available to us shows that there was no famous Hindu temple at the spot of the Babri Masjid. We have already seen that the Ramjanambhoomi can be identified with the site of Kaushalya Bhavan. It would be unnatural and incorrect to suppose that Rama was not born in the chamber of his mother.

Notes and References

1. W.C. Benet ed., *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh*, Vol. II, 1877, p. 6.
2. A. Fuhrer, *Archaeological Survey of India* (New Series), 1891, p. 297. An inscription saying that a Vishnu temple had been erected by Raja Jaichandra of Kanauj was found near the ruins of the Treta-ke-Thakur temple in Ayodhya. Fuhrer says that the inscription is at the Faizabad Museum. (All articles from

the Faizabad Museum had been transferred to the U.P. State Museum, Lucknow.) However, this inscription seen by Fuhrer is untraceable today. Raja Jaichandra of Kanauj was killed in 1194. An inscription dated 1187 was found near Faizabad when Major Caulfield was the Resident of Lucknow. (See *Asiatic Society's Journal*, Volume X, Part I, 1861.) From this inscription it is clear that, in 1187, Raja Jaichandra granted the village of Komali to Alenga of the Bharadwaj line. The gods mentioned in the copper-plate grant recording this donation are Vishnu and Lakshmi. (*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XIX, page 206.)

3. The earliest report of these mosques being in ruins is in the account of Montgomery Martin in *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, 1838, Vol. III, p. 334
4. Benet, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 6.
5. The British provided a historical basis to the circulating myth that Ayodhya and its religious places were restored by Vikramaditya of Ujjain. The first British historian to do so was Montgomery Martin. Martin writes:

> *The people of Ayodhya imagine, that after the death of Vrihadbala, their city was deserted, and continued so until the time of Vikrama, who came in search of the holy city, erected a fort called Ramgar, cut down the forests by which the ruins were covered, and erected 360 temples on the places sanctified by the extraordinary actions of Rama, of his wife Sita and brother Laksmana, and of his general Mahavira. The only foundation probably for such a tradition is that Vikrama may have erected some temples, and that in the Mahabharat the geneology of the family is continued no lower than the time of Vrihadbala, as being foreign to the subject of the book; but in the Sri Bhagwat, Vrihadbala is succeeded by 29 princes, and in the Bangsalata by 24. These taken according to the scales of Rama's predecessors in Valmiki and the Sri Bhagwat, would give 18 princes, and this will give us 279, or 558 years, according as we call these successions reigns or generations, bringing the existence of the family down to the time nearly of Alexander, but none of the latter princes rose to considerable power, and they were vassals of the king of Magadha. Their existence, however, throws a great doubt on the whole story concerning Vikrama. This Vikrama is usually supposed to have been the personage from whom the era called Sambat is derived, and, according to the reckoning used in Kosala, this era commences 57 years before the birth of Christ, so that the city had been then deserted for 280 years. How the places remarkable for the actions of God could be traced after such a long interval, and amidst the forest, seems rather doubtful; and the doubt will be increased, if we suppose that the latter Vikrama, the son-in-law of the Emperor Bhoj, was the person who constructed the temples at Ayodhya. (Montgomery Martin, op. cit., Vol. III, pp. 333–34.)*

   In later years, British historians (for example, see Elliot, 1870, Vol. I, p. 453) chose to ignore all doubts regarding Vikramaditya's discovery of Ayodhya and the establishment of the places of worship there.
6. See the account of the incident in Radhey Shyam Shukla, *Shri Ramjanambhumi, Sachitra Pramanik Itihas*, Ayodhya, 1986, pp. 81–82.

7. Ibid., pp. 15–16; also see the treatise prepared by the Imam of Babri Masjid (Imam Gafoor, *Babri Masjid*, Faizabad, 1987).
8. B.B. Lal, 'Report on the Archaeological Survey conducted in Ayodhya,' in *Indian Archaeological Review*, 1976–77, p. 53: 'It is rather remarkable that the Gupta period is not significantly indicated at this site, a fact also noticed in the first season's dig in 1975. After the early historic deposits, there is a break in the occupation, with considerable debris and pit formations before the site was again occupied during the eleventh century AD.'
9. The controversy regarding the epic city of Ayodhya still continues. See M.C. Joshi, 'Archaeology and Indian Traditions—Some Observations,' *Puratattva*, No. 8, 1975–76, pp. 98–102 and B.B. Lal, 'Ayodhya of Valmiki Ramayana: An Energizing Debate on its Identification,' *Puratattva*, No. 16, 1986–87, pp. 79–84.
10. Account of William Finch, in William Foster ed., *Early Travels in India*, 1921, pp. 176.
11. Montgomery Martin, op. cit., pp. 334–36.
12. W.W. Hoey, trans., *Tarikh-Farahbaksh* by Muhammad Faiz Baksh, Allahabad, 1887, pp. 31–165.
13. John Leyden, trans., *Memoirs of Zehir-ed-din Muhammed Baber, Emperor of Hindustan*, 1921, p. 333.
14. A.S. Beveridge, *Babur-Nama*, p. 670. Beveridge questions the document that Erskine thought showed that Babur had stayed in Ayodhya. She writes that she found it in the Memoirs (p. 420) and in Erskine's own codex of the *Waqiat-i-Babri*, f. 371, where however several circumstances isolated it from the context. She thinks that is distinctly separate from Abdur Rahim's text. She also doubts its authenticity because Babur did not march in AH 935 to Ghazipur. She feels that the document was a later addition that came to light in 1826. Erskine used it in his translation in 1854.
15. Ram Narayan, trans., '*Ayodhya Mahatmya* or Pilgrimage to Ayodhya,' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, No. 2, 1875, pp. 130–73.
16. Nevill's *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: District Fyzabad*, 1905, p. 178.
17. Ram Narayan, op. cit., p. 143.
18. Ibid., p. 148.
19. Ibid., p. 143.
20. Ibid., p. 159.
21. See Appendix on '*Nazul* lands'.
22. Cunningham 'Report of Archaeological Survey of India, 1862,' *JASB*, 1866, p. 243.

Chapter Seven

Buddhist Stupa?

Historical evidence has convinced us that the Babri Masjid was not constructed by Babur or his men. We also have conclusive evidence that no Hindu temple consecrating the birthplace of Rama ever stood on the spot of the disputed mosque in Ayodhya. But we cannot completely rule out the possibility of there having been some other ancient structure at the site.

The probability of another structure having existed on the site arises mainly because of the location of the Babri Masjid in the old city of Ayodhya. It is situated on a mound which is over twenty feet high in the east and more than forty feet in the west. The mosque also occupies the central position in the old city. As Ayodhya existed as a city long before the mosque was built, some other structure must have occupied this, the most central, spot. It is therefore necessary to go far back in history in an attempt to discover what lies inside the mound or stood on it.

Of the four archaeological excavations in Ayodhya, the last two, those by A.K. Narayan and B.B. Lal, have convinced us that an urban settlement existed in Ayodhya as early as in the seventh century BC. Of the two previous excavations, A. Cunningham started his survey in 1862 and submitted a report on his observations in 1865.[1] He appears to have been basically interested in discovering Buddhist places of worship. His study of Buddhist literary sources and the accounts of travellers helped him in locating these places. He retraced the path taken by the early Chinese travellers, Fa-hein and Huen-tsang. Fa-hein is said to have come to India between AD 400 and 415. Huen-tsang came later and is considered to have visited India during the reign of King Harsha, either around AD 672 or AD 692.

Cunningham started his survey from Delhi and proceeded via Mathura and Kanauj to Ayodhya. He writes:

> From Kanoj the two Chinese pilgrims followed different routes. Fa Hian having proceeded direct to *Sha-chi* (the modern Ajudhya, near Fyzabad on the Ghaghra), while Hwen Thsang followed the course of the Ganges to Prayag, or Allahabad. The first stage of both pilgrims would, however appear to be the same.[2]

He was convinced that the 'Sha-chi' of Fa-hein and 'Visakha' of Huen-tsang were the same as the Ayodhya of Valmiki. Cunningham wrote:

> Much difficulty has been felt regarding the position of Fa Hian's 'great kingdom of *Sha-chi*,' and of Hwen Thsang's *Visakha*, with its 'enormous number of heretics,' or Brahmanists, but I hope to show in the most satisfactory manner that these two places are identical, and that they are also the same as the *Saketa* and *Ajudhya* of the Hindus. The difficulty has arisen chiefly from an erroneous bearing recorded by Fa Hian, who places *Shewei*, or *Sravasti*, to the south of *Sha-chi*, while Hwen Thsang locates it to the north-east, and partly from this erroneous distance of 7 + 3 + 10 = 20 *yojans*, instead of 30, from the well-known city of Sankisa. The bearing is shown to be erroneous by the route of a Hindu pilgrim from the banks of the Godavery to *Sewat*, or *Sravast*, as recorded in the Ceylonese Buddhist works. The pilgrim after passing through Mahissati and Ujani, or Maheshmati and Ujain, reaches Kosambi, and from thence passes through *Saketa* to *Sewat*, that is along the very route followed by Hwen Thsang. We have, therefore, two authorities in favour of *Sewet* being to the north of Saket. With regard to the distance, I refer again to the Buddhist books of Ceylon, in which it is recorded that from *Sakespura* (or *Sangkasyapura*, now Sankisa) to Sewet was a journey of 30 *yojans*. Now, Fa Hian makes the distance from Sankisa to Kanoj 7 *yojans*, thence to the forest of *Holi*, on the Ganges, 3 *yojans*, and thence to *Sha-chi* 10 *yojans*, or altogether only 20 *yojans* or 10 less than the Ceylonese books. That Fa Hian's statement is erroneous, is quite clear from the fact that his distance would place Shachi in the neighbourhood of Lucknow, whereas the other distance would place it close to Ajudhya, or Faizabad, or in the

very position indicated by Hwen Thsang's itinerary. Here, again, we have two authorities in favour of the longer distance. I have no hesitation, therefore, in declaring that Fa Hian's recorded bearing of *She-mai* from *Sha-chi* is wrong, and that 'north' should be read instead of 'south'.

I have now to show that Fa Hian's *Sha-chi* is the same as Hwen Thsang's *Visakha*, and that both are identical with *Saketa* or *Ajudhya*. With respect to *Sha-chi*, Fa Hian relates that 'on leaving the town by the *southern* gate you find to the *east* of the road the place where Buddha bit a branch of the nettle tree and planted it in the ground, where it grew to the height of seven feet, and never increased or diminished in size.' Now, this is precisely the same legend that is related of *Visakha* by Hwen Thsang, who says that 'to the south of the capital, and to the left of the road (that is to the east as stated by Fa Hian), there was, amongst other holy objects, an extraordinary tree 6 or 7 feet high, which always remained the same, neither growing nor decreasing.' This is the celebrated tooth-brush tree of Buddha, to which I shall have occasion to refer presently. Here I need only notice the very precise agreement in the two descriptions of this famous tree, as to its origin, its height, and its position. The perfect correspondence of these details appears to me to leave no doubt of the identity of Fa Hian's *Sha-chi* with the *Visakha* of Hwen Thsang.

With respect to the identification of Visakha with the Saketa of the Hindus, I rest my proofs chiefly on the following points: first, that *Visakha*, the most celebrated of all females in Buddhist history, was a resident of Saketa before her marriage with *Purana Varddhana*, son of *Mrigara*, the rich merchant of *Sravasti*; and, second, that Buddha is recorded by Hwen Thsang to have spent 6 years at *Visakha*, while by the Pali annals of Turnour he is stated to have lived 16 years at *Saketa*.

The story of the noble maiden Visakha is related at great length in the Ceylonese books. According to Hardy, she erected a *Purvvarama* at *Sravasti*, which is also mentioned by Hwen Thsang. Now, there was also a *Purvvarama* at Saketa, and it can hardly be doubted that this monastery was likewise built by her. She was the daughter of *Dhananja*, a rich merchant, who had emigrated from *Rajagriha* to *Saketa*. Now, amongst the oldest inscribed coins which have been discovered at Ajudhya, we find some bearing the name of *Dhana Deva* and *Visakha-Dutta*. I mention this because it seems to me to show the probability

that the family of Dhananja and Visakha was of great eminence in Saketa or Ayodhya, and I infer from the recurrence of their names, as well as from the great celebrity of the lady, that the city may possibly have been called Visakha after her name.

The other proof which I derive from the years of Buddha's residence is direct and convincing. According to the Ceylonese annals, Buddha was 35 years of age when he attained Buddhahood, he then led a houseless life for 20 years, preaching in various places in Northern India, all of which are detailed, and of the remaining 25 years of his life he spent 9 in the Jetavana monastery at Sravasti, and 16 in the Pubharamo monastery at Saketapura. Now, in the Burmese annals these numbers are given as 19 and 6 years, and in the last figure we have the exact number recorded by Hwen Thsang. Nothing can be more complete than this proof. There were only two places at which Buddha resided for any length of time, namely, Srawasti, at which he lived either 6 or 16 years, and as according to Hwen Thsang he lived for 6 years at Visakha, which is described at some distance to the south of Sravasti, it follows of necessity that Visakha and Saketa were one and the same place.[3]

Cunningham then goes on to show that *Saketa* was the same as Ayodhya, the capital city of the *Ramayana*. He asserts: 'But the question would appear to be set at rest by several passages of the Ramayana and Raghuvansa, in which *Saketanagara* is distinctly called the capital of Raja *Dasharatha* and his sons.[4] Cunningham was further convinced that modern Ayodhya was the same as the Saketa or Ayodhya of the ancient days. Professor B.B. Lal is also certain that the present-day Ayodhya was identical to the Ayodhya of the *Ramayana*.[5] As already observed, we accept the identification of the Ayodhya of today with the Ayodhya of the Epic period, on the basis of tradition. We also accept Cunningham's contention that present-day Ayodhya was the same as the 'Sha-chi' of Fa-hein and the 'Visakha' of Huen-tsang. In other words, we believe that Ayodhya must have been a famous centre of Buddhist activities.

We have evidence that Ayodhya was the centre of activities of several religions. Before the eleventh century, Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism all seemed to have prospered in the city. Hans Bakker observes;

> *in the first thousand years, Buddhism and Brahminism/early Hinduism may have been alternatively to the fore depending on the religious preferences of the ruling kings, whereas Jainism seems to have remained a more constant but a modest factor.*[6]

Buddhism continued to be a strong force with a large following in Ayodhya till the sixth century AD. When Fa-hein visited 'Sha-chi' or Ayodhya in the beginning of the fifth century AD, he observed strong currents of Buddhist activity. But when Huen-tsang came to 'Visakha' or Ayodhya in the seventh century, he found that the force of Brahmanism had strengthened. As such, we could deduce that Buddhism had started declining in significance and following, compared to Brahminism, when Huen-tsang visited the city. Cunningham also observes that, after the seventh century, the significance of Buddhism started declining in North India. He was convinced that by 1000 AD, Buddhism as a religion had lost the race to early Hinduism.

Cunningham was convinced that Gautam Buddha had lived in Ayodhya for some time, on the basis of the Buddhist annals of Ceylon and Burma and of the writings of Huen-tsang. He believed there definitely would have been several *stupas* to commemorate his stay. He started his survey of Ayodhya with the aim of rediscovering the ancient Buddhist remains. Cunningham was, in some ways, influenced by the local myths and, therefore, made feeble attempts to co-relate the Buddhist past with the Hindu traditions about Saketa and Ayodhya. He was, however, surprised that no one in the city was even aware of the Buddhist traditions. With regard to the famous legend of a 'tooth-brush tree', he writes:

> *I was disappointed, when at Ajudhya, in not hearing even the most distant allusion to the legend of the tooth-brush tree of Buddha, but the tradition still exists, as I heard of it quite unexpectedly at two different places immediately afterwards, first at Hatila, distant 15 miles, and next at Gonda, 29 miles to the north of Ajudhya.*[7]

Cunningham was convinced that the only ancient structures in Ayodhya were the suspected Buddhist remains. He rejected outright the theory that there was any ancient Hindu temple in

Ayodhya. He found the Hanuman Garhi to be the oldest Hindu structure but was convinced that it was no older than the time of Aurangzeb.[8] He observed: 'There are several very holy Brahminical temples about Ajudhya, but they are all of modern date, and without any architectural pretensions whatever.'[9] Cunningham made an attempt to discover the ancient structures. He wrote: 'The only remains at Ajudhya that appear to be of any antiquity, are, three earthen mounds to the south of the city, and about a quarter of a mile distant. These are called *Mani Parbat, Kuber Parbat* and *Sugrib Parbat*.'[10] It is surprising that Cunningham did not include the mound on which the Babri Masjid stands today, though it occupies the most central position in the old city of Ayodhya. From the west, the mound appears quite similar to the three mounds mentioned by Cunningham.

Regarding the antiquity of the mounds, or *parbats* as they are known among the local people, Cunningham observed:

> *The first (Mani-Parbat), which is nearest to the city, is an artificial mound, 65 feet in height, covered with broken bricks and blocks of kankar. The old bricks are eleven inches square and three inches thick. At 46 feet above the ground on the west side, there are the remains of a curved wall faced with Kankar blocks. The mass at this point is about 40 feet thick, and this was probably somewhat less than the size of building which once crowned this lofty mound.*[11]

Cunningham relates a local story: 'According to the Brahmans the *Mani-Parbat* is one of the hills which the monkeys made use of when assisting Rama. It was dropped here by Sugriva, the monkey-king of "Kishkindhya" '.[12]

Five hundred feet due south from the *Mani Parbat* stands another mound, called the *Kuber Parbat*, which is only 25 feet in height. Cunningham writes:

> *The surface is an irregular heap of brick rubbish, with numerous holes made by the people in digging for bricks, which are of large size, 11 inches by 7¼ to 2. It is crowned by two old tamarind trees, and is covered with jungle ... . Still nearer on the south-east there is a large*

oblong mound called Sugrib-Parbat, which is not more than 8 or 10 feet above the ground level. It is divided into two distinct portions, that to the north being upwards of 300 feet square at top, and the other to the south upwards of 200 feet. In the centre of the larger enclosure there is a ruined mound containing bricks, 8½ inches square, and in the centre of the smaller mound there is a well.[13]

Similar bricks are to be found in the mound on which the Babri Masjid stands. Professor Romila Thapar was surprised when she was told about the presence of the large-sized bricks. She felt that the bricks could have been of the Sunga period.[14]

The local Hindus believe that the *parbats* were created by the labourers engaged in the construction of the Ramkot, the fort of Rama in Ayodhya. They say the labourers shook their baskets every evening and the piles of dust formed mounds. The mounds are therefore called *jhawa-jhar* or *ora-jhar*, both of which mean 'basket-shaking'. They cannot explain why bricks appear in the mounds.

Between the *Mani* and *Kuber Parbats*, there is a small Muslim enclosure, 64 feet from east to west and 47 feet in width. It houses several tombs and is said to include the famous tomb of the *paigambars*, Sis and Ayub. The local Muslims have their own myths about the tombs of Sis and Ayub Paigambars. They say that at one time the tomb of Sis Paigambar was 90 feet long. The ravages of times reduced it to 21 feet. Some maintain that Sis Paigambar was extraordinarily tall and his pace measured about 90 feet. It is true that the tomb of the *paigambar* increased in size over time. In 1862, when Cunningham visited the enclosure, the tombs measured 17 feet and 12 feet in length.[15] These tombs are also mentioned by Abul Fazl, who says, 'Near this city there are two sepulchral monuments, one 7 and the other 6 cubits in length. The vulgar pretend that they are the tombs of Seth and Job, and they relate wonderful stories of them.'[16] This shows that since the time of Akbar the tomb of Sis Paigambar increased in length from 7 cubits, or 10½ feet, to 17 feet in 1862 and to 21 feet in 1987. It is clear that the length has increased because of the repairs carried out by pious Muslims.

Cunningham was convinced that the tombs of the two *paigambars* were actually the graves of the Muslim soldiers who had accompanied the early Turkish expeditions into Ayodhya and Bahraich. He substantiated this opinion by quoting the accepted Islamic practice of burying their dead along the road. However, the local Muslims refuse to believe this. They claim that the soldiers who had accompanied Syed Salar Masud and were killed were buried far down the route from Ayodhya to Lucknow. They contend that the ghosts of Masud's soldiers still roam the area in the dead of night. In 1905, Nevill was surprised to find that in Ranauli, close to Ayodhya, people would not pass that way after midnight. They said that at that time the road was thronged by headless horsemen, the silent host of Syed Salar Masud, presumably on their way to Bahraich.[17]

Cunningham was convinced that the tombs were closely associated with Buddhism. He believed that the area in question was the place where Buddha had planted the legendary 'tooth-brush tree'. He observed on the basis of Fa-hien's account:

> *According to Fa Hian, the place where Buddha planted the holy tree was to the east of the road, on issuing from the town by the southern gate. Hwen Thsang's account agrees with this exactly, in placing the 'extraordinary tree to the south of the capital and to the left of the route'. This tree was the celebrated 'tooth-brush' or twig used in cleaning the teeth, which having been cast away by Buddha, took root and grew to between 6 and 7 feet in height. Now it will be observed that the ruined mounds that still exist, as well as the tombs of Seth and Job, are to the south of the city and to the east or left of the road. The position therefore is unmistakably the same as described by the Chinese pilgrims, and as the actual state of the ruins agrees well with the details given by Huen Thsang, I think that there can be no reasonable doubt of their identity.*[18]

Cunningham was convinced that the four tombs within the Muhammadan enclosure were actually raised on four platforms where the four previous Buddhas used to sit:

> *Hwen Thsang ... describes the site of the tooth-brush tree and of the monument where the four previous Buddhas used to sit and to take*

exercise, as being close to the great stupa. These places I would identify with the courtyard containing the tombs of Seth and Job, which touches the side of the Mani-Parbat. The two tombs I take to be the remains of the seats of the four previous Buddhas, and the paved courtyard to be the scene of their daily walks, although I was unable to see the footmarks, which were seen by the Chinese pilgrim. A close look at the tombs of Sis and Ayub Paigambars reveals that the bricks at the base are very different from the bricks used to cover the tomb. The walls of the courtyard also shows the use of several different set of bricks. The bricks at the base of the wall are very similar to the kind of bricks used at the base of the tomb. The use of different sets of bricks clearly reveals the re-structuring of the wall as well as the tomb. The set of bricks at the base of wall and tomb clearly identified the structure to the age when the stupas must have been raised. The size of the bricks at the base was similar to the bricks of the mound.[19]

However, despite this evidence, the local Muslims refuse to believe that the tomb is a recent addition. For them, the myth has sanctified the place. The local Muslims, in an attempt to establish their claim over the tombs, have placed two red stone slabs inside the courtyard. The slabs are clearly incongruous in the courtyard. They appear to be parts of some graves and bear the years of death of the persons. The years inscribed on the slabs are 1100 Hijri and 1173 Hijri. It is probable that the slabs are a later addition and have been introduced inside the courtyard to strengthen Muslims' claims over the place by projecting its antiquity. Local Hindus had started laying claim to the enclosure, saying that there was once a temple of *Shesh Bhagwan* in that place.

Cunningham discusses the mounds in great detail. He was certain that they were on the sites of the Buddhist *stupa*. The great *stupa* referred to is, in Cunningham's view, a *stupa* of Ashoka. The *stupa* according to the British archaeologists, was 200 feet high and built on the spot where the Buddha had preached the law during his six years' stay in Saketa. This, in Cunningham's view, was the *Mani Parbat*. He observed:

This monument I would identify with the Mani-Parbat, which is still 65 feet in height and which with its masonry facing must have been at

least as high again, and with the usual lofty pinnacle of metal may have easily reached a height of 200 feet. Hwen Thsang ascribes the erection of this monument to Asoka, and I see no reason to question the accuracy of his statement, as the mixed structure of half earth and half masonry must undoubtedly be very ancient ... . There are many of these barrows still standing at Lauriya-Nanandgarh to the north of Bettiya, but this is the only place where I have yet seen them. They are undoubtedly the most ancient monuments of the Indian population, and I firmly believe that even the very latest of them cannot be assigned to a lower date than the fifth century before Christ. I base this belief on the known fact that all the monuments of Asoka's age, whether described by Huen Thsang or actually opened by myself near Bhilsa, are either of stone or brick. The earthen barrows are therefore of an earlier age, but such as are Buddhist cannot possibly be earlier than the beginning of the fifth century before Christ. In the case of Mani-Parbat at Ajudhya I infer that the earthen barrow, or lower portion, may belong to the earlier ages of Buddhism, and that the masonry or upper portion was added by Asoka. At the foot of the mound I picked up a broken brick with the letter 'sh', of the oldest form, stamped upon it, but as this is almost certainly of later date than Asoka, it most probably did not belong to the Mani-Parbat building.[20]

We had observed earlier that Cunningham was anxious to discover all the places that had been pointed out by the Chinese traveller. The first monument described by Huen-tsang was a great monastery without a name, but as it was the only notable monastery, it was most probably either the *Kalakarama* of Saketa, or the *Purvvarama*, both of which are mentioned in the Sri Lankan *Mahawanso*. The monks at that monastery were of the school of *Sammateyas* and it was famous for having produced three of the most eminent Buddhist controversialists. This monastery, Cunningham identified with the *Sugrib Parbat*, which he said was about 500 feet long and 300 feet broad. The great size and the rectangular form of this ruin are sufficient to show that it must have been a monastery, but this is placed beyond all doubt by the existence of an interior well, and by the remains of cloistered rooms forming the four sides of the enclosure. The position of the monastery to the south of the city and to the east or left of the road coincided completely with the bearings given by Huen-tsang.

Cunningham was anxious to discover the last monument described by Huen-tsang. This was a *stupa* that contained the hair and nails of the Buddha. This monument was said to have been surrounded by a number of smaller monuments which seemed to touch one another, and by several tanks that reflected the sacred building in their limpid waters. Cunningham identified this *stupa* with the *Kuber Parbat* which touched the south side of the enclosure round the tombs of 'Seth' and 'Job' and was closed on the west side. He adds that one of the tanks described by the traveller might have been the *Ganes Kund*.[21] However, Cunningham failed to notice either the ruins or the remnants of the several buildings surrounding the *stupa*. The geographical location of the mound on which the Babri Masjid stands clearly shows that the *stupa* containing the hair and nails of Buddha might have been at that spot. We must remember that Huen-tsang visited the place in the seventh century AD and, at that time, he did not find the *stupa* in ruins. It is certain that he must have seen it surrounded by several smaller temples and buildings and also that on the west of the *stupa* must have been the tank or reservoir in which it was reflected.

The mound of the Babri Masjid occupies the central position in the old city of Ayodhya and is likely to have been surrounded by smaller buildings. To the west of the mound is the trough-like formation which Cunningham identified as the bed of a river. It is certain that at the time of Huan-tsang's visit, there must have been water in the depression to the west of the mound. Naturally, the *stupa* would be reflected in the water as the sun rose. It is certain that the mound on which the Babri Masjid stands once enclosed the *stupa* which contained the hair and nails of the Buddha.

It is clear from the Pali canons that Saketa had been a centre of Buddhist activities since circa 500 BC. Buddhism continued to receive support, on and off, from the political rulers of the city. Huen-tsang came to *Visakha* in the fourth decade of the seventh century. By that time, Buddhism had declined considerably and he found less than twenty monasteries, with three thousand monks, and about fifty Brahminical temples, and a very large Hindu population. If Buddhism was quite prosperous in Ayodhya/Saketa up to the seventh century, there must have been several structures raised to commemorate the presence of Gautam Buddha in the city.

Notes and References

1. Alexander Cunningham, '*Archaeological Survey of India: Four Reports Made during the Years, 1862–63–64–65*,' Vol. I,.Simla, 1871, published in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, (*JASB*), Vol. XXXIV, Part I, Nos. I–IV, Calcutta, 1866, pp. 155–278.
2. Ibid., p. 216.
3. Ibid., pp. 239–40.
4. Ibid., p. 241.
5. B.B. Lal, 'Ayodhya of the Valmiki Ramayana: An Energizing Debate on its Identification,' *Puratattva*, No. 16, 1984–85, pp. 79–84.
6. Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, Holland, 1987, p. 36.
7. Cunningham, op. cit., p. 248.
8. Ibid., p. 243.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 244.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Based on conversation with the author.
15. A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India: Four Reports Made during the Years, 1862, 1863, 1864, 1865*, Vol. I, Simla, 1871, p. 244.
16. Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Vol. I, pp. 33–35.
17. Nevill, *Fyzabad Gazetteer*, p. 32.
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19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., pp. 246–47.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Rathyatras have been organised in Ayodhya since 1984 to extend consciousness among the Hindus about the goal of the liberation of the Ramjanambhoomi in Ayodhya. It has added violent overtones to the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi dispute. In fact, the conflict that arose in 1949 between the Hindus and Muslims over the possession of the mosque was shifted to the judicial arena for arbitration and the political, social and religious tensions that arose in Ayodhya and Faizabad were contained for a long time. But the declaration by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of its intention to liberate the birthplace of Shri Rama in Ayodhya, the birthplace of Shri Krishna in Mathura, and the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi, again brought the question of the Babri Masjid and Ramjanambhoomi to the forefront of national issues. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad took the offensive, when several Hindus took an oath to fight for the liberation of the Ramjanambhoomi. In 1987, the Parishad announced that it would take over all the mosques that had been raised on the sites of destroyed Hindu temples.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad wants to undo the realities of history. It apparently seeks to efface from memory that period of history which, according to them, saw the oppression and humiliation of the Hindus.

The declarations of the Parishad and their logic naturally created an atmosphere of fear among Indian Muslims. They drew the conclusion that the occupation of the mosques in Ayodhya, Mathura and Benares would lead to the take-over of other mosques and would logically culminate in the occupation of their homes. In these circumstances, a very large section of Indian Muslims began

questioning their decision to choose secular India rather than Islamic Pakistan. They were convinced that a 'Hindu nation' would have no place for non-Hindu people.

R.E. Frykenberg believes that the idea of a Hindu nation is as old as the British empire.[1] He emphasises that the logic of empire necessitated the policy of 'Hinduisation' and the imperial government supported the emergence of local deities and the celebration of local festivals:

> *Indeed despite the shock of many in Britain when they learned of this policy of "Hinduization" and despite the lobbying of the Anti-idolatory connection league against the Indian Government's violation of its proclaimed "religious neutrality", support for Hindu institutions did not end.*[2]

The policy of the government in the early part of the nineteenth century was to consciously encourage the integration and mobilisation of 'Hindu' institutions—that is, all religious institutions which were not openly Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Sikh—into a common identification as belonging to a single religion. This process of basing identity in religion merged with the new force of nationalism which demanded for its growth a democratic environment within the British empire. Democratic institutions based upon the principle of the 'majority' naturally led to a coalescence of the idea of Hindu nationalism with Indian nationalism. A sense of fear naturally gripped the other religious groups, which were in the minority. This fear had at times found an outlet in activities that were termed, by the majority, as 'anti-national'. Animosity between the majority and the minority religious communities grew in this atmosphere. Today, it has become focused on the Babri Masjid–Ramjanambhoomi issue.

The growing popularity of Shri Rama coincided with the growth in the activities of the Ramanandi sects. Abul Fazl, the chronicler of the Mughal emperor Akbar, accepted that Ayodhya was also known as the Ramjanambhoomi or the place of birth of Rama. However, till the seventeenth century, all activities and places associated with Shri Rama were limited to the banks of the river in Ayodhya. William Finch tells us about the bathing *ghats* but does

not talk about temples situated in the city. He also relates some local myths—that Vishnu took human form in Ayodhya, about the ruins of the fort of Rama and the Swargaddwar. The last two places described by Finch were situated on the banks of the river. This naturally raises the issue of whether there were no places associated with Rama inside the city of Ayodhya known till the seventeenth century.

During the eighteenth century a struggle continued between the 'Shaiva' *Sanyasis* and Vaishnava *Bairagis* over the possession of religious places in Ayodhya. Shaivas were dominant in Ayodhya and elsewhere. Although, Hans Bakker claims that there was a continuity in the traditions of Rama *bhakti* and Ayodhya, he does not deny the conflict between the Shaivas and Vaishnavas. The '*Sanyasis*' were a militant group and the *Bairagis* could only take over by waging a bloody war. There is evidence that Raja Naval Rai, a Rama *bhakta*, encouraged the building of several Rama temples in Ayodhya. The *Bairagis* received encouragement and political backing to win away the places of worship from the *Sanyasis*. It was during his time that building activity in Ayodhya was encouraged and therefore Cunningham could say that most of the temples in Ayodhya appeared only as old as the period of Aurangzeb.

However, the local myth-makers, faced by the problem of finding a historical personality and attributing to him the construction of the famous Ramjanambhoomi temple, said that a king called Bikramjeet had constructed it. Montgomery Martin was also told in 1838, about the famous temple and he concluded that the Bikramjeet of the local myths was actually Vikramaditya the ruler of Ujjain. However, he did not believe that Vikramaditya of Ujjain discovered the birthplace of Rama and re-established the other religious places associated with Rama. According to the myths in circulation the religious places discovered and established by Vikramaditya numbered 360. Martin doubted the existence of these temples and also the story that the Mughal emperors had destroyed Hindu temples. He writes:

> *... These temple remains enable us to judge of the period when they were built; and the destruction is very generally attributed by the*

> Hindus to the furious zeal of Aurangzebe, to whom also is imputed the overthrow of the temples in Benares and Mathura. What may have been the case in the two latter, I shall not now take upon myself to say, but with respect to Ayodhya the tradition seems ill-founded. The bigot by whom the temples were destroyed, is said to have erected mosques on the situation of the most remarkable temples, but the mosque at Ayodhya, which is by far the most entire, and which has every appearance of being the most modern, is ascertained by an inscription on its walls to have been built by Babur, five generations before Aurangzebe. This renders the whole story of Vikrama exceedingly doubtful, especially as what are said to be the ruins of his fort, do not in any essential degree differ from those said to have belonged to the ancient city, that is, consists entirely of irregular heaps of broken bricks, covered with soil, and remarkably productive of tobacco.

He adds further:

> None of the Hindu buildings at present existing are in the least remarkable either for size or architecture, and they are all not only avowedly, quite modern, that is, they have been all erected since the reign of Aurangzebe, or most of them even within the memory of man ... . Their being built on the spots, where the events which they are intended to celebrate, actually happened, would have been extremely doubtful, even had the elder Vikrama built temples on the various places which had been destroyed by Aurangzebe, so that the spots selected by Vikrama might be known by tradition; but the whole of that story being liable to strong suspicion, we may consider the present appropriations of names to different places as no better founded than the miracles, which several of them are said to commemorate.

Montgomery Martin is the first historian who relates the local myths of Ayodhya. It was he who raised the matter of the black-stone pillars in the mosque:

> That they have been taken from a Hindu building is evident from the traces of images being observable on some of their bases; although the images have been cut off to satisfy the conscience of the bigot. It is possible that these pillars belonged to a temple built by Vikrama, but I

think the existence of such a temple doubtful; and if it did exist, it is probable that the pillars were taken from the ruins.[3]

Martin expressed his doubts about the theory that the Muslim rulers dispossessed people from land and destroyed non-Islamic buildings. He, in fact, believed that the Muslim rulers preserved the social and cultural fabric of the land:

It must be observed, notwithstanding the ferocity usually attributed to the Muhammadan conquerors of India, that scarcely any family of note among the native chiefs, who possessed the country before the conquest, had become extinct, or been deprived of its lands during the long period which followed under Muhammedan control. But that, during the Hindu government, each change had been followed by the complete banishment of the family that was subdued. Although many of the chiefs pretend to be descendants of the family of the sun, none of these allege that their ancestors have retained uninterrupted possession; on the contrary, they all admit that their ancestors had retired to the west, from which they again returned, after an interval of many ages ... . It is also to be observed, and I think to be much regretted, that the operations of our [British] systems of finance and law have done more in twelve years to impoverish and degrade the native chiefs, who succeeded the impure tribes, than the whole course of Muhammedan government.

Despite the attempt of Montgomery Martin to examine the question in a rational manner, other British historians continued the process of providing a historical basis to the local myths. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Erskine provided credence to the story that Vikramaditya had gone to Ayodhya. He set down his own assumption that Vikramaditya discovered the several places associated with Rama and constructed 360 temples in Ayodhya. He was probably puzzled by the number 360 but did not fail to provide a reason for the number. He wrote that Vikramaditya had chosen to re-establish 360 places of worship associated with Rama in Ayodhya because the number tallied with the number of wives he is said to have had. The writings of Leyden and Erskine convinced the British officials posted in Avadh about the truth of the local myths. Carnegy, Benet and Nevill all came to believe that

Babur had come to Ayodhya and destroyed the Ramjanambhoomi temple. They also regarded as historical the story that Vikramaditya constructed 360 places of worship in Ayodhya. Along with the officials, archaeologists and some scholars also came to regard the myths as historical truths.

It is certain that the myth that Babur destroyed the Ramjanambhoomi temple and constructed a mosque instead came into circulation in the nineteenth century. We do not have any historical evidence to show that the myth existed before this. This is not surprising, taking into consideration the political and religious environment in Ayodhya. In the eighteenth century, the Ramanandi sect had gradually established itself. It started acquiring land in the city. Soon after, the sect clashed with the *Sanyasis* for the possession of religious places. In the nineteenth century the domination of the Vaishnava *Bairagis* was so complete that when Martin visited the city in 1838, he called Ayodhya the Hindu city and Faizabad the Muslim area. After the *Bairagis* had taken all the important places of worship from the Shaivas, they started raising claims over other religious places, particularly those of the Muslims. It was during this time that claims over the Babri Masjid might also have been raised.

Nor is the contention of the Muslims that Babur had the mosque constructed borne out by the evidence available. The style of writing of the inscriptions on the walls of mosque clearly indicates that they are additions of a recent date, while the style of architecture is not representative of the sixteenth century but resembles several Sharqi mosques of the fifteenth century. Again, the presence of a Jami Masjid in Ayodhya before the time of Babur is natural. Not surprisingly, the mosque is at the highest and most central spot in the city. There are non-Islamic elements in the material used for its construction. These, however, cannot be said to be exclusively Hindu. The material could have been a part of either a Hindu, Jaina or Buddhist structure.

Claims and counter-claims were made by the two communities for a long time before they finally led to bloody conflict, between 1853 and 1855. The British sought to resolve the situation by physically demarcating the rights of the two religious communities in the area. The Hindus were to worship at the raised platform outside the eastern entrance of the mosque and the Muslims were

to enter the mosque from the north gate. But the tension between the two communities was not resolved and, in fact, continued to grow till, finally, Hindu groups have declared their intention to demolish the mosque and construct a glorious temple to commemorate the birthplace of Rama.

The state seems to have played a significant role in supporting the cause of the Hindus. The British Government openly encouraged the *Bairagis*. They were allowed occupation over *nazul* land and were encouraged in their building activity. Although in 1885 the *Bairagis* were not allowed to physically occupy the land in front of the Babri Masjid, in 1901 the Government was a party to the demarcation of the religious places in Ayodhya. It is significant that the local committee formed by the District Magistrate chose to mark out only Hindu places of worship. Clearly, the Magistrate believed that Ayodhya was an exclusively Hindu city.

In 1949, the state once again came to the support of the Hindu cause. Following the conflict that arose around the Babri Masjid, the District Magistrate asked the Imam to leave the premises, while he allowed entry to a *maharaj* (cook), and two *purohits* (priests). In 1986, the doors of the mosque were unlocked and the Hindus were allowed to establish a Rama temple in the central sanctum. However, the Imam was not allowed to hold prayers in the mosque. In 1989, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad laid the foundation-stone of the Rama temple in front of the Babri Masjid. The question is, may they do so? All land in Ayodhya is *nazul* land and without the permission of the State Government, no land can be utilised for any purpose by any party. It is necessary for the Government to put a complete end to any building activity in Ayodhya. To preserve history, the building of the mosque should be handed over to the Government of Uttar Pradesh, for maintenance as a historical monument.

Notes and References

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2. Ibid., p. 30.
3. Martin, op. cit., pp. 334–35, 335–36, 336.

Glossary

aarti: a Hindu religious ritual.
akhand kirtan: non-stop devotional singing.
akhara: a Hindu monastic sect.
avatar: an incarnation of a Hindu God.

Bairagis: an ascetic Hindu sect.
bhakta: worshipper; follower; often used to refer to the poets and saints associated with the Bhakti movement.
bhakti: devotion; a devotional movement within Hinduism.
bhandari: cook; one who prepares the *bhog*, or food, offered to the deity.
bhoomi: land, earth.
bhukti: Mauryan province.
bigha: measure of land; in UP, generally five-eighths of an acre.

chabutra: platform.

darshan: 'audience' of a holy place or person.
dharma: faith.
Digambari: 'sky-clad'; a Hindu sect.

faqir: Muslim mendicant or holy man.
firman: imperial order; injunction; edict.

Gaurakshini Sabha: Cow-Protection Society.
geru: red loam.
ghat: landing-place.
gosain: a Hindu religious mendicant.

haveli: an administrative area made up of several *mahals*.

Imam: head of, or one who leads the prayers in, a mosque.

janapada: early kingdom in North India, *c.* sixth century BC.
jehad: a religious war enjoined upon Muslims against non-believers.
jhula: swing; festival in the month of Shravan (the rainy season).
Jogi: a Hindu ascetic who practises a system of meditation and physical control.

kankar: pebbles.
Kartik Purnima: November full-moon.
kasauti: touchstone.

Khakhi: 'ash-smeared'; a Hindu ascetic order.
Khankha: a Sufi Muslim order.
Khanzada: Rajput convert to Islam.
kirtan: Hindu devotional singing.
Kshatriya: the Hindu caste of warriors/rulers.
kuroli: a distance of two miles.

mahal: smallest unit of land for revenue administration.
Mahanirbani: 'the silent ones'; a Hindu ascetic sect with an obligatory vow of complete silence for its members.
Mahant: head of a Hindu sect.
Mahatmya: a Hindu pilgrim-guide.
maufi: revenue-free.
mauza: village; revenue-paying unit.
mazaar: Muslim shrine at the grave of a holy man.
mehndi: henna used to dye hair; festival during the rainy season when henna is applied on the palms of women.
Moulvi: a Muslim judge.
mufti: a Muslim religious leader.
Muharram: a Muslim festival.
munsif: a district judge.

namaz: canonical prayer, enjoined on Muslims five times a day.
nawab: honorific plural of *naib* ('deputy')—Muslim governor or ruler.
nazar: ceremonial present to overlord.
nazul: land owned by the state.
Nirbani: 'the silent ones'; a Hindu ascetic sect.
Nirmohi: 'the detached ones'; a Hindu ascetic sect.

parbat: mound; small hill.
pargana: subdivision of a district.
paigambar: a Muslim prophet.
peer: a Muslim saint.
pujari: a Hindu priest.
punya-nadi: a holy river.
punya-sthan: a holy site.
punyatra: a holy journey; a pilgrimage for a Hindu.

qalandar: Muslim ascetic; conqueror.

Ramnavami: festival of Rama's birth.
rath: temple-car.
Rath Yatra: ceremonial procession of a temple-car.

sadguru: a Hindu religious teacher revered as second only to God by his devotees.
sadhana: worship.
sadhu: a Hindu holy man.
sant: a saint.

Sant movement: an off-shoot of the Bhakti movement in areas of Eastern UP and Bihar.
sanyasi: a Hindu ascetic.
Shaiva: a worshipper of Shiva.
shilanayas: foundation-stone laying ceremony.
Shivratri: a Hindu festival.
shuddhi: process of 'purification' to convert non-Hindus or to raise the status of low-caste Hindus; introduced by twentieth century Hindu reform movements.
smarana: to recall; worship through repetition of the name of God.
sthan: a spot or site.
stupa: a dome-shaped Buddhist monument.

tahmad: lungi; a loose, ankle-length garment wrapped around the hips.
tamasha: a spectacle.
tazia: model tombs of Imam Hasan and Imam Husain carried in procession during Muharram.
tirtha: a place of pilgrimage for Hindus.
tirthankar: one of the twenty-four deified Jaina saints.
tirthayatra: pilgrimage.
twarikh: history.

Upanga: Jaina scriptures.
urs: annual religious singing at the tomb of Sufi saints.

Vaishnava: a worshipper of Vishnu in any of his incarnations.
varaha: boar; the third incarnation of Vishnu.
vihara: Buddhist monastery.

Appendix

The 'Nazul' Lands of Faizabad and Ayodhya

The Government properties in Faizabad administered as *nazul* by the Deputy Commissioner include the whole of the revenue *mauzas* of Faizabad and Ayodhya, Ramkot, Bagh Bijesi, and that part of Maujha Jamthara which lies within the Municipal limits, as well as small portions of the Raigunj Bazar and Katra Yakut Khan, and a few detached plots. All these lie within the boundaries of the municipality, except part of Bagh Bijesi. Beyond those limits, *nazul* lands under the same management include the old forts at Akbarpur and Ranuahi, the income from the former having been since 1903 credited to the town fund set up by statute. Moreover, the whole revenue *mauza* of Tanda is *nazul* the management and income being made over to the Municipal Board. The estates under the Board of Revenue include the rest of Maujha Jamthara, small plots of Shahzadpur, Ibrahimpur, Deoli and Darabgunj, a grove at Aurangabad and the old fort at Bandipur. These were managed as *nazul* till October 1900. From 1872 up to the same date four alluvial villages in the Gonda district on the north of the Ghagra were managed jointly with the Faizabad *nazul* lands, but were then handed back to Gonda District. The village of Ibrahimpur Churaman near Tanda was given to the Government by decree in 1869 and has always been managed as an estate under the Board of Revenue, and a share in Asapur, near Ayodhya railway station, which in 1902 was taken over by the Government in the absence of heirs, has been held in the same way. A number of other properties owned by the Government at different times, have been alienated. The estates administered by the Board of

Revenue are managed in the usual method and scattered *nazul* plots outside the municipalities are of no importance.

It is otherwise with the *nazul* at Faizabad and Tanda. Ayodhya has been crown property ever since it came under a Governor appointed by the Nawab of Avadh. Faizabad was treated in the same manner by Shuja-ud-daulah, who enclosed in his outer fortifications the lands of eighteen villages. With the decay of the city, the unoccupied lands were re-settled with zamindars, and at the death of Bahu Begam all that remained *nazul* was Ayodhya, Faizabad and Maujha Jamthara. On annexation, the old *nazul* office was continued and the only important change was the imposition of annual rents instead of taking initial dues on lands newly occupied or reoccupied for building purposes. At the summary settlement in 1856 little attention was paid to *nazul* property, and portions were settled with persons who had been merely farmers; but at the regular settlements the question was fully examined and at the survey Faizabad and Ayodhya were demarcated as two *mauzas* (revenue units), the cantonment was also separately defined, and villages outside the city and cantonment were excluded from the city *nazul* area.

Numerous legal suits were brought forward at the time of settlement with regard to property in the city, but no complete registers of *nazul* property were prepared for a long time in spite of orders in 1869 and 1870. The necessity for such registers was increased by a number of alienations of portions, made from time to time, and also by the absence of complete revenue records for most of the property. Ramkot and Bagh Bijesi had been formerly decreed to be Government property, and these villages with Jamthara had been assessed to revenue, only surplus profits being retained as *nazul* receipts; but this had not been done in the case of Faizabad and Ayodhya, and consequently the full settlement records of these villages were not prepared, in spite of the fact that they contained most complex tenures, including about a hundred specific holdings under proprietary rights and more than a dozen *maufis*. The result has been an almost endless series of decrees and suits. Confusion also existed as to the relation of the municipality with the property.

From 1859 to 1875 both municipal and *nazul* work was in the

hands of a committee which was called the 'local fund committee', and afterwards, for one purpose, 'the municipal committee' and for the other 'the local agency'. The accounts had not been kept separate and even the settlement officer and other authorities referred to the municipality as if it were the owner of *nazul* property. In 1873 this mistake was pointed out, but the separation of funds was not carried out till April 1875. The municipality attempted to obtain control of the *nazul* property in 1878, 1882 and again in 1886, but without success. In 1900, the board was given, as a final settlement of its claims, the management of two cart paroas and of shops in the Sarai, Terhi bazar and Miangunj, as well as a permanent annual contribution of a third of the *nazul* income. The general confusion that had existed with regard to *nazul* management was made clear at the last settlement. It was found that 553 *bighas* of cultivated land were held free of rent without any right, and similar trespass had occurred with regard to house-property; tenures were wrongly recorded, and the administration was generally lax. A report on the subject and the issue of *nazul* rules of 1899 resulted in a reorganization of the staff and undertaking of a detailed survey with the preparation of a complete record-of-rights. In 1901 all persons claiming proprietary rights were called upon to present their claims; 3,757 persons obeyed the summons, 88 applications referring to land pure and simple, and the rest to land occupied by houses. The decisions of these claims and the preparation of the records was not completed until April 1905, when a complete record of rights was, for the first time, framed for the 2,136 acres of Faizabad and the 755 acres of Ayodhya, including 1,988 and 723 acres of *nazul* land respectively. The task was one of great difficulty, especially with regard to rights in house sites, for owing to ill-informed views, want of proper records and the pressure of claimants without title, the real nature of the tenure had been obscured. It was necessary to indicate the Government ownership of all land, other than that decreed or disposed of to others, and at the same time to safeguard the interests of old house-owners who had long occupied them rent-free. The final settlement with regard to old house sites was to the effect that the land was assigned to the occupier on condition that it should revert to Government when the owner of the building

died without an heir or if the building fell down and was not repaired or replaced within three years by the owner or his assigns; that no rent should be paid; and that transfers of the right of occupation, but not of the right in land, should be legal. An entry was made to this effect in 9,320 house plots in the two cities; but there are also considerable numbers held on rent, most of them being on regular leases obtained from the *nazul* office.

In 1899, before the new rules came into force, the income from *nazul* was Rs. 29,097, of which Rs. 24,019 was derived from property within the municipality. In 1904 the latter produced Rs. 31,537, the rest having been either taken over by the Board of Revenue, or by the municipalities, or by the Gonda district. Of this sum Rs. 4,160 came from houses and buildings, Rs. 21,342 from lands, Rs. 1,588 from gardens, and the remainder from miscellaneous items.

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IN AID AKHAND KIRTAN

Appeal to the Devotees

Shri Ram Janama Bhumi of Ayodhya is a very sacred plaee. Anticipating Hindu-Muslim friction the Govt. has declared it a disputed place and has taken possession over it Regular case is beina conduted in the civil and criminal court. Since 27 Decem-1949, day and night Akhand Kirtan is being performed with a determination that it will continue so long as RAM JANAM BHUMI is not freed

The Late Baba Ram Lakhan Sharan had started this Akhand Kirtan, Now Ram Dayat Sharn is conducting this Akhand Kirtan at persent. Rs.5000 per month is being spent over the food etc. of thirty persons performing the Kirtan.

It is the sacred duty of the entire Hindu Community to finance this hole cause and thus donars will earn immence "PUNYA" The donors must obtain the receipt for their contribution from Akhand Kirtan.

Address for Sending Donations–
Ram Dayal Sharn
Akhand Shri Sitaram
Nam Sankirtan Kosh
Shri Ram Janam Bhumi
Ayodhya Distt. Faizabad
(U. P.)

Appeale made by
Sakuntla Nayar Ex.MP.
Lorepur house
Faizabad

Sahkari Press, Bazaza Faizabad.

From the time the country attained Independence, the issue that has perhaps most exacerbated communal tensions in India is the one surrounding the Babri Masjid. The problem is rooted in the claim of Hindu fundamentalists that the Masjid was actually the site of a temple commemorating the birth of Rama and that this temple was torn down by the Mughal Emperor Babur who constructed the mosque in its stead.

This issue has assumed menacing proportions of late, with both Hindus and Muslims adopting increasingly confrontationist stands. Yet, there is in fact virtually no historical evidence to support the Hindu claim that the Babri Masjid stands on the site of a Ramjanambhoomi Temple or, indeed, that Babur built the contentious mosque.

Dr Sushil Srivastava's balanced account of the origins and growth of the conflict is informed by a genuine concern to see the revival of the glorious traditions of Ayodhya — and, indeed, the country as a whole — which have been cosmopolitan and secular over the centuries and wherein all religions have so far co-existed peacefully. It is the author's belief that the only way to achieve this is to bring the issue out of the confines of fundamentalistic jingoism and into the realm of rational inquiry.

Marshalling an impressive array of historical evidence, Dr Srivastava contends that the belief among a section of Hindus that the Masjid stands on the site of a Hindu temple is the outcome of a number of developments which all coalesced at the end of the forties. Among these are:

- The struggle between Vaishnavas and Shaivas in the eighteenth century over the control of religious sites in Ayodhya (Faizabad).
- The perpetuation by nineteenth century British historians of the belief that Babur built the disputed mosque. Interestingly, Muslims of the area furthered this historical distortion for their own reasons.
- The policies followed by the British government which encouraged divisiveness among Indians on the basis of religion. And, after Independence, the State authorities only made matters worse by espousing the Hindu cause in one form or another.
- The spread of numerous myths which rapidly gained the status of facts and which have enhanced communal tension and suspicion.

While the last word on this complex issue will not be said for a long time to come, there is little doubt that Dr Srivastava's sober analysis will constitute a major contribution to this debate. In short, a book that all those interested in contemporary India's society and polity cannot ignore.

Sushil Srivastava is presently Reader in the Department of Medieval and Modern History, Allahabad University. He has been a Research Fellow of the Indian Council of Historical Research and has published various articles in scholarly journals.

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